

GENEVIEVE

OR,

THE HISTORY OF A SERVANT GIRL,

AND THE

STONEMASON OF SAINT POINT.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

OF

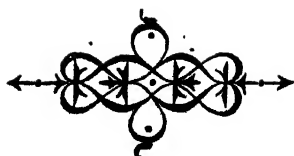
ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE.



LONDON:

WARD, LOCK, AND CO., WARWICK

DORSET BUILDINGS, SALISBURY SQUARE



TO
MADEMOISELLE REINE GARDE,
Dressmaker,
AND FORMERLY A DOMESTIC SERVANT,
AT AIX,
IN PROVENCE.



PREFACE.



I.

BEFORE commencing with the history of Genevieve, this series of tales and dialogues for the use of the *people* both in town and country, it will be well for me to say in what spirit they have been conceived, on what occasion they were composed; and why I dedicate this first tale to Mademoiselle Reine Garde, dressmaker, and formerly a domestic servant, at Aix, in Provence. This is my reason:

II.

I had gone to pass a part of the summer of 1846 in that Smyrna of France which is called Marseilles,—a town whose commercial activity renders it worthy to serve as a principal harbour for our merchant fleet, and as a rendez-vous for those fire-caravans of the West, our railway trains; a town whose Attic taste for all manifestations of genius, qualifies it, like the Smyrna of Asia, to glory in the recollections of great poets. I was residing out of the town (which was too noisy for an invalid), in one of those villas, or *bastides*, which have sprung up in such numbers in its neighbourhood, and which afford, on leisure days, an opportunity for enjoying the sight of the ships and the breezes of the sea, to a population that revel in natural pleasures, and drink in the poetry of their beautiful climate through all their senses.

The garden of the little villa in which I lived, opened by a small door on to the sandy beach of the sea, at the end of a long avenue of plane trees, behind the mountain of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde, and close by that little river which, overhung by mastic trees, serves as a girdle to the beautiful park

and the Tuscan or Genoese villa of the Borelli family. From our windows we could hear the slightest movement of the waves on their sandy bed, and when we opened the garden door we could see the foam-fringed billows advance nearly to the wall, and retire again immediately, as though, in endless play, alternately tempting and disappointing any who might essay to dip their hand into the waves. I used to spend hours upon hours sitting on a large stone, under a fig-tree beside this gate, contemplating that light and movement which is called the sea. From time to time, the sail of a fishing-boat, or the plume-like smoke from the funnel of a steam-vessel, glided along the chord of the arc that formed the gulf, and relieved the monotony of the horizon.

III.

On work-days this beach was almost entirely deserted; but on Sundays it was animated by groups of lazy sailors, of rich and unemployed porters, and by the families of the merchants of the town, who came to bathe or to sit down upon the sunny shore. The murmur of men, women, and children, enjoying rest and sunshine, mingled with the babbling of the light and delicate waves which rolled like sheets of polished steel upon the sand. Numbers of little boats, propelled either by sails or oars, doubled the point of the pine-crowned cape of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde. They used to cross the gulf, and discharge their load of passengers on the opposite side. We could hear the palpitations of the sails, and the cadence of the light oars, as well as the conversations, the songs, and the laughs of the pretty flower-girls and orange-venders of Marseilles,—daughters of Phocæa, who love their gulf, and delight to play with the foam of their native element.

IV.

With the exception of the patriarchal family of Rostand, those great ship-owners who unite Smyrna, Athens, Syria, and Egypt to France by their extensive commerce, and to whom I was indebted for all the pleasure of my first journey in the East; with the exception also of M. Miegé, the general agent of all our maritime diplomacy on the Mediterranean,

and of Joseph Autran, that Oriental poet who will not leave his horizon, because he prefers his native sun to glory,—I knew few people at Marseilles. I did not seek to make acquaintances. My object was to gain leisure by isolation, and leisure for study. I was writing the history of one revolution, totally unconscious that another revolution was already looking over my shoulder to seize my pages almost before I had done writing them, and to place another drama of France, not under my pen, but within my hand.

V.

BUT Marseilles is hospitable like its sea, its port, and its climate. Beautiful natural scenery opens the heart. Where the sky is smiling overhead, man is also tempted to smile. Scarcely was I established in the suburbs, when men of letters, political men, enterprising merchants, young men whose ears still echoed with my earlier poems, and even workmen, many of whom read, write, study, sing, versify, and labour at the same time, flocked into my retreat, but with that delicate reserve which constitutes the charm and grace of hospitality. The kindness of this reception enabled me to enjoy unfettered pleasures; I devoted my mornings to study, my days to solitude and the sea, and my evenings to a small number of unknown friends, who came from the town, to chat about travels, literature, or commerce.

VI.

THESE questions of commerce, Marseilles does not contract into questions of petty trade, paltry thrift, and parsimony of capital; Marseilles views them on a grand scale, as an expansion and dilatation of French labour and of the raw material for that labour, exported and imported between Europe and Asia. Commerce, with the Marseillaise, is a lucrative diplomacy, at once national and local. There is patriotism in their enterprises, honour on their flags, and policy in their cargoes. Their commerce is an unceasing warfare, which they wage at their own risk and peril on the waves, to do battle with the rivals of France for the possession of Africa and Asia, and to extend their country and the French name upon the opposite continents of the Mediterranean.

VII.

One Sunday, on my return from a long sea excursion with Madame de Lamartine, we were told that a woman of modest and embarrassed appearance had arrived at Marseilles by the diligence from Aix, and had been waiting for us for four or five hours in a little grove of orange-trees, which led from the drawing room of the villa into the garden. Madame de Lamartine entered the house, and I went myself into the orangery to receive this poor stranger. I knew no one at Aix, and I was entirely ignorant of the motive that could have induced this patient traveller to wait for us nearly half a day.

On entering the orangery, I saw a woman, still young, of about thirty-six or forty years of age. She was dressed in a manner indicative of a humble station; her gown of striped calico was discoloured and faded, and she wore a white cotton handkerchief round her neck; her black hair was neatly braided, but rather powdered, like her shoes, with dust. Her features were beautiful and delicate, of that soft and agreeable Asiatic configuration which excludes all tension of the muscles of the countenance, which expresses nought but candour and inspires only attraction; her large eyes were of a blackish blue, her mouth rather depressed, her forehead as smooth as that of a child, her cheeks full towards the chin, and united by perfect feminine undulations to her swelling neck, that bore a striking resemblance to the neck of a Grecian statue; a look as clear as the reflection of moonlight on the sea; an expression of timidity mingled with confidence in the indulgence of others, emanating from the unreserve of her whole nature. In all, the image of one who bears goodness in her attitude as well as in her heart, and who hopes to find it in others. I easily perceived that this woman, still agreeable, must have been very attractive in her youth. She still possessed what the people, who have a definition for everything, call the *grain of beauty*, that prestige, that ray, that star, that magnet, that unknown something which makes its possessor always attractive and charming. Her embarrassment and blushes at my appearance gave me time to look at her, and feel myself at ease, at peace, and in comfort with this unknown. I begged her to sit down on one of the

in the orangery, and to encourage her to do so, I sat down on one opposite. She blushed more and more, she stammered, she passed her beautiful, though rather large, hand over her eyes. She evidently did not know what attitude to take, or how to begin. I strove to reassure her, and endeavoured by some questions to open the way to the conversation which she appeared at once to desire and fear.

VIII.

"Madame!" said I. Her blushes increased.

"I am not married, sir," said she; "I have no husband.

"Well then, miss, will you tell me why you have come so far, and why you have waited so long to see me? Can I be of any service to you? or have you a letter to give me from any one in your part of the country?"

"Oh, no," said she, "I have nothing to ask of you, and I should have taken good care not to ask for a letter to you from one of the gentlemen in my country, or even to let them know that I had come to Marseilles to see you. They would have taken me for a vain creature who wanted to make herself greater than she is, by going to see men who have made a name in the world. Oh, no! it is not that."

"Well, then, what have you come to tell me?"

"Nothing, sir."

"How, nothing? But it is not for nothing that you have taken the trouble to lose two days in travelling from Aix to Marseilles, to wait for me here until sunset, and to return home again to-morrow!"

"It is nevertheless true, sir; you must think me very silly. Well, I have nothing to tell you, but I would not for the world have it known at Aix that I have been here."

"But what reason, then, has induced you to come hither; you are not like one of those waves, that you see out there, that come and go without knowing wherefore. You have a mind; you appear to be lively and sensible, come, think a moment! what was your idea in taking a place in the diligence from Aix, and coming in it here to my house?"

"Well, sir," said she, passing her two hands over her face, as if to conceal her blushes and embarrassment, and throwing back her luxuriant tresses of black hair behind

her neck, "it is true, I had an idea,—an idea which has prevented me from sleeping for these eight days. I said to myself: 'Reine, you must gratify your wish. Say nothing to anybody, shut up your shop early on Saturday evening, take the night coach, spend Sunday at Marseilles, go and see the gentleman, return to Aix on Sunday evening, on Monday-morning set to work again, and all will be accomplished. You will have pleased yourself for once in your life, without your neighbours so much as knowing that you have even gone out of your house.'"

IX.

"But why were you so anxious to see me, and how did you come to know that I was here?"

"Oh, sir," replied she, "this is how I knew it; there is a gentleman at Aix who is very kind to me because I make his daughters' dresses, and I was once a servant in his mother's country-house. The family have always taken an interest in me and helped me, for in Provence the nobles and the poor people do not despise one another, but all reciprocate kindly feelings and mutual consideration. So this gentleman and his daughters, who know how fond I am of reading, and that I have no means of buying books and newspapers for myself, sometimes lend me a paper when there is anything in it that they think will interest me, such as pictures of the fashions, or patterns of ladies' bonnets, or interesting romances, or poems like those of Reboul, the baker of Nismes, or of Jasmin, the haddresser of Agen, or like yours, sir; for they know how I delight in reading verses, especially such as sound well in the ears, or that bring tears into the eyes."

"Ah! I understand," said I, with a smile; "you are a poetess, like the breezes that sing among your olive-groves, or the dews that weep on your fig-trees."

"No, sir, I am a dressmaker, a poor dressmaker of — street, at Aix; and indeed I do not blush to tell you so, for I do not pretend to be more of a lady than my mother made me; I began by being a servant, and lived for eighteen years as nurse in Mr. —'s family. Ah! what good people they were. Ask them about me. They always look upon

me as one of the family; and I do the same. The only reason that I left them was on account of my health which compelled me to become a dressmaker, and to sit alone in my room with my goldfinch. But that is not what we were talking about. You asked me why I had come hither, and how I knew that you were here. I will tell you, sir:

X.

“Eight days ago I read in a Marseilles paper some superb verses, addressed by M. Joseph Autran to M. de Lamartine. These verses awakened in me a passionate desire to see the person who had inspired the poet of our province with such beautiful thoughts. I inquired if it were really true that you were at this moment at Marseilles; and I was told that you were actually here. I could no longer enjoy rest or quiet until I had gratified my desire. I came hither without ever thinking that I had neither a new gown nor a decent head-dress, nor any dress in which to present myself before persons of a condition superior to my own, and now that I am here, I don’t know what to say, and I stand before you like an adventuress who has come to cheat honest people. However, sir, you may be sure that I am no such person, and to prove this, now that I have seen you, and you have received me with so much kindness, I go away contented, without asking for anything more from you than the pleasure of having seen you.”

“Oh, rest satisfied, Miss,” said I, “that I have not taken you for a single moment to be other than you represent yourself: your face is the very best recommendation you could have. The ears, it is true, sometimes allow themselves to be deceived, but the eyes never; your countenance is too transparent with candour and goodness to serve as a mask for an intriguer. Nature never made features tell such gross falsehoods. I feel myself as much at ease with you as if I had known you from your birth. But I will not permit you to go away until we have had a little more friendly conversation, and you have partaken of the hospitality of my frugal table. My wife, who is dressing for dinner, will be as glad to see, as I am to meet, you. Spend the evening with us, and while we are waiting dinner tell me how your taste

for reading arose, and what is the origin of your fondness for poetry, and your passion to know the men whose works you have read."

"I will try, sir," said she, "but my story will not be a long one. My life may be summed up in two words—*labouring and feeling.*"

XI.

"My name is Reine Garde; and I was born in a village in the neighbourhood of Aix in Provence. When very young, I entered into the service of Madame de * * *, who had some young daughters. I was a nurse at the château; I saw the young ladies grow up, and I grew with them. They treated me rather as a sister than as a servant; and their father and mother, for their sakes, treated me almost like one of their children. I never would get married because I did not want to leave them. In going in and out of the room, whilst the ladies were pursuing their studies, I picked up some of their lessons. I read in their books, in fact, I was like the wall that hears everything and says nothing. In this way I learned by myself to read, write, cypher, sew, embroider, wash, and cut out dresses,—indeed, all that a girl can learn during an expensive apprenticeship. I myself used to cut out their clothes; at Aix, I dressed their hair for balls or evening parties. They thought nothing well done unless I did it, and in return, when they went out looking beautiful and nicely dressed to a ball, and I was obliged to sit up in the room for them often till two or three o'clock in the morning, that I might undress them on their return, they used to say to me: 'Here, Reine, is one of our books, that will amuse you while we are dancing.' I used to take it, and sit down alone by the side of the fire, and read the book all night long; and then when I had finished it, I read it over again, that I might thoroughly understand it; and when, by reason of my simplicity and ignorance, I did not quite comprehend something, I used to ask them to explain it to me, and they took pleasure in gratifying me. In this way, sir, I read the story of poor *Laurence* in your poem of *Jocelyn*. How it made me weep, one night, when the ladies had left it open on their table. Ah! I used to say to myself,

‘I should very much like to see the person who wrote this !
You know, sir, how the *plaint* runs :

“ *Qu’est-ce qui a fait cette chanson ?—
Un marin sous sa toile,
Pendant qu’il carguait la voile,
En revoyant sa maison.*” *

“Oh ! yes,” said I, “I am well acquainted with that complaint of the sailor who signs his poetry in action, and who puts his name in his last verse, as Phidias wrote his under the sole of the foot of his statues, or Van Dyck his with a brush on the collar of the dog in all his paintings, so that the name of the artist may live as long as his works. But go on : tell me how it was you left these kind people, and what you are doing now.”

XII.

She resumed, “When the young ladies married, and their mother died, I was obliged to leave, as there was nothing for me to do. I would not go to service again : I had been so happy in my first place that all others would have seemed uncomfortable, and I should not have been able to go heartily to work. My master gave me a little present of fifty crowns in memory of his wife ; and the young ladies said : “Never fear, we will not allow you to beg your bread.” I was not without courage, and I was well known, and I may say well esteemed by all the good families of Aix ; so I hired a room with a little shop, in a small retired street, where rents are not high, and I set up as a dressmaker. I gain my living by my needle ; I am loved by my neighbours, who supply me with as much work as I can do ; I am not ambitious, live frugally, and desire no more than enough to pay my expenses, and to put by a little for the time when my eyes will grow dim, and I shall be unable to sew so fast. I also sell some few articles of haberdashery to my neighbours. I have my bird to keep me company, or rather I *had* him,

* “Say from whose pen these verses come ?—
A sailor wrote them on the seas,
Trimming his sail before the breeze,
Joyful, at sight of home,”

for he is dead ; but another has been given to me, that I shall love very much, perhaps, but not so much as the first. On Sundays and holidays I read ; in short, sir, time does not hang heavily on my hands. And then everybody is kind to me at Aix. Would you believe that gentlemen like yourself, gentlemen from the fashionable part of the town, learned men, members of the Academy even, who know that I am fond of reading, and that I have occasionally written some nonsense, verses for fêtes for this or that person,—would you believe that they are not ashamed of stopping before my door as they go along, and entering my shop, sometimes to bring me a book that they lend me, sometimes a paper, and to talk familiarly with me as if I were somebody ? Ah ! our country of Aix is the best in the world as far as the people are concerned. I don't think there's another like it anywhere.

XIII.

"So you write verses, Miss Reine," said I, with a smile ; 'I fancied as much when I saw your beautiful, dreamy eyes. There is never a sky without clouds ; dreams and verses are the tinted clouds of those pretty eyes of yours. Well ! I have given up writing poetry, but I am still fond of hearing it. Perhaps you can remember some of the poems that you have composed, and would be kind enough to repeat them to me while we are waiting for dinner. See, this is a fine opportunity for reciting poetry ; the setting sun, the sea sounding in your ears, rolling in and carrying back with each wave multitudes of shells that sound like a young girl singing to the accompaniment of her castanets, the orange-trees that drop their clusters of white blossoms on to your raven hair, and a stranger, who was once a poet, seated before you and alone with you to hear your verses repeated by your musical voice—have you not an audience as good as that of the Academy of Aix, or Marseilles, or even of Paris ?"

"I should never dare to think of doing so," replied Reine, raising her eyes towards the dark foliage of the orange-trees, as if she were seeking her bird among their branches. "Ah ! no, I should never dare. But, Sir, I have brought with me a few that I have written at different times at my leisure, to show to M. Autran, if he asked to see them. I would

rather that you should read them than that I should repeat them aloud ; that will make me less ashamed, for the paper cannot blush."

And she took out of her pocket three or four little poems written on coarse paper, and crumpled by her needle-case, her thimble, and her scissors during the journey. Whilst I was reading them in a low tone, she hid her face with her handkerchief, and turned away to look towards the other end of the orangery, afraid of discerning some unfavourable expression on my countenance.

XIV.

I was astonished and touched by what I read. Her verses were natural, graceful, sincere,—the tranquil beating of her heart that had become harmony in her ear, they resembled her modest, pious, tender, and gentle face ; the true poetry of a woman, whose soul sought to express her feelings, on the sweetest chord of an instrument she did not understand. They were neither heart-rending, nor metallic like the verses of Reboul ; nor epic and glittering by turns with spangles and tears like those of Jasmin ; nor affected like the strophes of some young ladies, prodigies spoilt in the germ by imitation, that Mephistophiles of prematurely budding genius. They were herself : the monotonous and plaintive air that a poor sempstress sings to herself in an under-tone, as she sits working by her window, to keep up her spirits as she stitches on. There were some notes that touched the heart, and others that expressed nought but vague and inarticulate music. The breath failed ere the aspiration was half over, but the aspiration was strong and just, penetrating into the heart and into heaven. You were more moved than astonished by reading it. It was poetry in its first instinctive state, popular poetry as it is everywhere when it begins among the people, even if the voice of art has not yet lent it its assistance. A melancholy monotony, a romance in three notes, seven or eight images to express the infinite.

XV.

I returned the papers to Reine, telling her the simple

truth, devoid of all flattery. I said that there were some charming things in her poems, and that she had truly received from God two excellent gifts,—the gift of thinking justly, and expressing gracefully, and then the gift of gifts, the gift of a tearful voice; but that I was far from advising her to publish just yet a collection of her poems, which, like certain waters, were fit to be drunk at the fountain-head alone.

"Ah! sir," cried she, "what is it you say? I never thought of such a thing. Me to make a book? My good angel himself would laugh at me. I only wrote those on Sunday to amuse myself, instead of going for a walk. I have not even shown them to my good friends at Aix. When one lives alone in a room, as I do, one is sometimes obliged to speak to oneself aloud to be convinced of one's existence. Well! sir, these verses are the way in which I speak aloud to myself. When I am very sad, this is the way I comfort myself.

XVI.

"You are sad then, sometimes?" asked I with real interest.

"Not often, sir, thank God! I am of a cheerful disposition, but you know all have their troubles, and I have mine among the rest, especially as I have neither parents, nor family, nor husband, nor children, nor nieces about me, and I go up stairs alone every evening into my room, to wake up all alone again in the morning, and hear nothing but the feet of my bird on the wires of his cage. Even if the birds did not die, sir, and were like the parrots and parrots that we see on the quay at Marseilles, and that live, I am told, a hundred and one years, we should be sure not to want for company till the end of our days. But you get fond of a bird, and then he dies: one fine morning you wake up, and no longer hear your little friend singing by the window; you call him but he does not answer; you get out of bed and run to the cage, and what do you see? A poor little creature with his head lying on the floor, his beak open, his eyes shut, his legs stiff, and his wings extended, in his poor prison! Adieu, all is over! No more joy, no song, nor friendship in the room; no one to greet you fondly

when you come in? Ah! that is very sad, sir, I assure you!"

And she brushed away two large tears from her eyelids.

"You are thinking of your goldfinch, Miss Reine," said I.

"Alas! yes, sir," said she, with a blush, "I have been thinking of him ever since I lost him in that way. When we have not many friends, we hold to the few that the good God grants us. My bird loved me so much! We talked to one another so often, and we used to provide such treats for one another!"

"Have you not written anything, Reine, about the grief that seems so to wring your heart?"

"Yes, sir, no later than last Sunday, when I saw his cage empty, and the withered chickweed still hanging there, I felt the tears coming into my eyes; so I sat down to write some verses to my poor goldfinch, as if he had still been alive to hear them. But I could not finish them; it grieved me too much."

"Repeat your verses to me, or at least those that you remember. Never mind skipping a stanza here and there; it is the sentiment and not the rhyme that I wish to hear."

She reflected for a few moments, and then repeated several stanzas, in a tone as tender and caressing as if she had been speaking to the bird itself. The verses were characterized principally by tenderness of feeling, and were evidently the outpourings of the grief of an affectionate heart at the loss of a favourite and cherished companion.

XVII.

I thanked Reine for her courtesy in thus laying open to me a heart in which the love of a bird held so conspicuous a place. Madame de Lamartine now came in, and receiving her with such tender cordiality as removed all timidity, took her to dine with us, under a lentiscus, where the sea-breeze refreshed us, and sang to us songs as sweet as those which the shade of her goldfinch used to sing in Reine's poetical ear. Accustomed to live among the peasant-women of Saint Point and Milly, my wife needed only to change the landscape to fancy herself at home again. Reine loved her as soon as she saw her, became devotedly attached to her, and ever since

has continued to write to her once or twice a-year, sending her good wishes, and some specimen of her ingenuity as a needle-woman.

XVIII.

After dinner, we all three went and sat down in an empty boat that had been hauled up on to the sand. We resumed our conversation with Reine, and amused ourselves with watching the foam dash against the keel of our stranded vessel.

"You are then very fond of reading? Indeed, you must have read a great deal to have taught yourself to speak your language so well, and to express your thoughts in such harmonious verses."

"Oh! yes, madam," replied Reine; "reading is my greatest delight, next to praying to God, and endeavouring to obey the laws of Providence. When a person gets up at sunrise, and keeps on sewing till evening shades begin to fall, she is obliged to give her fingers a little repose, and her mind a little occupation. People such as I am have no society; we stand on our door-steps, and say 'How d'ye do,' or 'Good night,' to our neighbours, and then all go in-doors again, some to get supper ready, others to put their children to bed—some to amuse themselves among their families, and others to go to sleep, that they may be ready to go to work again the next morning early. There are many also who go to places where they waste their time and their youth;—to the public-houses or the coffee-shops. But what can honest girls like myself do all the rest of the evening, especially in winter, when the days are short? We must either read, or else become stupid with looking at our four walls, or watching the logs smoke on the chimney hearth."

"But what can you read?" asked my wife.

"Ah! there is the difficulty, madam," answered Reine. "We must read, and yet we have no books. Books were made for other people; excepting the Evangelists and the man who wrote the *Imitation of Jesus Christ*, authors have not thought of us when writing their books. It is very natural that they should not, madam; for every one thinks of those of their own class. Authors, writers, poets, men who have written poems, tragedies, comedies, romances, have all been men of a rank in life superior to ours, or who, at least,

springing from our obscure and laborious class, have risen to mix in drawing-rooms with the society of kings, queens, princesses, courts, noblemen, the rich, the fortunate, the classes of leisure and luxury, in their time and country."

"They would naturally forget you, and neglect you," I said, "to write or to sing for the amusement of persons of the sphere in which they themselves moved; consequently, they must have their ideas, write up to their knowledge and their taste, speak their language, depict their manners. Now, this intelligence, this knowledge, this refined, delicate, and capricious taste of the higher classes, this language, these manners, cannot belong to you, the poorer classes, at all events, until popular education has taught you to appreciate them. Among the ancients, there were many slaves, such as Epictetus, Æsop, and Terence, who became authors, philosophers, and poets; but there was no literature for the slaves. They had Socrates, whom Plato was obliged to explain to the people; Plato, who in his turn had to be interpreted by very learned disciples; Cicero, who wrote only in the Platonic style, and for men such as Scipio and Atticus, the most profoundly learned men in Rome; Virgil, who recited his pastorals to the princesses of the court of Augustus, but whom real shepherds and shepherdesses would not have understood; Horace, who sang of nothing but wine, idleness, and licentious love, whilst the people of his Tiber were imbibing their own sweat with the water of their cascades. He drank in their murmurs through his ears; but the Roman labourers, artisans, and stone-cutters drank nothing but their clear water. His verses were so contorted, so full of ambiguities and figures borrowed from Greece or from history, that the people of his time could neither sing nor understand them. And thus it has been with almost every succeeding writer."

"That is true," said Reine; "excepting *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Lives of the Saints*, what books are there that have been written for such as we? . . . Ah! there are besides, it is true, *Telemachus* and *Paul and Virginia*," she added; "and they are very amusing and very touching, especially *Paul and Virginia*. But, nevertheless, *Telemachus* treats of the manner in which we must set to work to govern a people, and that has nothing to do with us; and the book was written for the education of the grandson of a king, and that is not

our station, is it, madam ? As for the other, it touches every one's heart; it tells us how people love one another, how they cannot live without each other, how they desire to get married, that they may be happy, and how they quit their ambitious parents, who are more anxious for the wealth than the happiness of their children. But then, Virginia is the daughter of a general; she has an aunt who claims to be a lady of quality; and so she is sent to a convent; all these adventures, though very interesting, are not such as we have. They are pictures of things that we have never seen, and that we never shall see, in our homes, in our families, in our rank of life. They are above us, madam; we shall never reach them. Who, then, writes books or poems for us ? No one ! except those who make the almanacks, and who fill them with nonsense and jokes, repeated year after year ; those who write romances that girls are obliged to hide away from the sight of their honest mothers; and those who write songs that chaste lips refuse to sing. I do not speak of M. Béranger, though it is said he has some of this kind upon his conscience, but who now expresses the wisdom and goodness of his soul in couplets that are too beautiful to be sung ! Ah ! when will there be a library for the poor ? Who will be charitable enough to write us a book ?"

XIX.

She said this with a good sense so superior to her education, and in a tone so penetrated with the intellectual indigence of the class to which she belonged, that I could not help reflecting for a moment on the truth and importance of her observations.

"I have already thought about these matters," said I, "but never so much as when listening to you just now. It is true that those who are anxious to instruct, amuse, and interest themselves by works of imagination, to be moved by sentiment, and to elevate themselves by thought, will either die of inanition, or become intoxicated with corruption, unless something is done for them. Society must look to it, or Providence must raise up a popular genius, an artizan Homer, a labourer Milton, a soldier Tasso, an industrial Dante, a Fénélon of the cottage, a Racine, a Corneille, a Buffon of the workshop, to make for themselves alone that which an egotistical

or idle society will not make for them,—a commencement of literature, a poetry, a sensibility of the people!

“I pass in review before my mind at this moment all the shelves of a well-composed library, I lay my hand, in idea, upon all the principal names that I find there, and I seek to group together a collection of volumes that will serve to nourish the inward life of an honest family of labourers, of servants, of workmen, men, women, children, young girls, and old men; books to be left on the table, and with which each may commune in silence, on Sundays or in the evenings, without needing a translation or an interpretation that they may be understood. What do I find?

XX.

“There is the Bible. It is an incomparably beautiful book, full of the right sort of mental food for the people; but there are in it many mysteries, and many narratives of crimes and wickedness that might lead to misapprehension if the whole of it were given to the people without note or commentary. There are Homer, Plato, Sophocles, Æschylus! But they belong to other times, describe other manners, and are written in another language. They are in Greek, and, therefore useless. There are Virgil, Horace, Cicero, Juvenal, Tacitus. They are in Latin, the people do not understand it. They too, are useless! There are Milton, Shakspeare, Pope, Dryden, Byron, and above all, Crabbe! They are in English . . . useless! There are Tasso, Dante, Petrarch, three admirable poets! But they are in Italian . . . useless! There are Schiller, Goethe, Wieland, Gessner! In their writings there are some beautiful pages for the people, for German poetry descends to the people because the people ascend to it. But they are in German . . . useless! There are Cervantes, Calderon, Lope de Vega! But they are parodies of that chivalrous genius of which this age has not to correct itself; besides, they are in Spanish . . . useless! There are the great and sublime oriental poets of India, Persia, Arabia! They contain hidden treasures of human imagination and wisdom, whose ingots might be coined for the use of future ages. But they are in Persian, in Arabic, in Sanscrit; we need miners and coiners to make these poems available; now they are useless!

"There are our own French poets; their works are only chivalrous romances, cynical adventures, gallant rhymes addressed to imaginary Amaryllises and court beauties Useless! There is Pascal: scholastic polemics on dogmatic refinements unintelligible to common sense; or some thoughts sublime in expression, but sublime only as the abyss of the unknown is sublime,—of the unfathomable, of despair! This book would make people mad if it did not make them anchorites. . . . Useless! There is Bossuet: prophetic language, biblical eloquence, systematic history, making worlds to roll around a desert tribe, an orator thundering over the heads of kings, but making his lightnings shine upon courts with a complaisance at once adroit and severe, and striking none but the people, whom he delivers over, body and soul, to the modern cynics. Some fragments, some scintillations of his genius, some extracts from his discourses are all we can take; the rest is useless! There is Fénelon: much may be derived from his *Telemachus* and his *Correspondence*. We find in him a religious soul, a humane philosophy, the grace, the unction, the odour of virtue; but pages only, and not the whole book will do for the people! There is Corneille: a political and summary genius, whose flights are too high for the human heart. Some scenes, some maxims, some explosions in verse may be got from him, but nothing more! The people live on details of sentiments, and not on summaries. In the people's view, genius resides in the soul; the genius of Corneille, like that of Tacitus, was in his language! There is Racine: he was born to be the poet of the people, but unfortunately there was no people in his time. Courts took him; let them keep him. From his works we can extract for the masses only his two biblical tragedies, *Athalie* and *Esther*, for his poetry became popular in becoming religious. The rest belongs to drawing-rooms.

"There is Voltaire: a man of encyclopædic mind, but always mind, good sense, knowledge, criticism, satire, *finesse*, railery, playfulness, sometimes cynicism. Never soul, tenderness, love, pity, and piety, those gifts of genius to all who suffer. The philosopher of the happy, the aristocrat of the intellectual, a half-enlightened poet from whom the simple-hearted can get little; the lustre of libraries, but entirely out of place in the abodes of the indigent.

"There are all our historians. Not one for the people, since the time of the chroniclers. Montesquieu is too lofty; Rollin excellent, but too servile a translator of antiquity, and too prolix for those who have regard to time!

"There are our romance-writers! all taking their heroes and heroines from the higher ranks of society, and clothing sentiment in the jargon of the drawing-room instead of in the language of unsophisticated nature. Their works are almost entirely useless to the people!

"There are our philosophers! Descartes, Malebranche, Condillac, and all the moderns: you may reprint them as often as you please, I defy you to make the people read them; for the philosophy of the people does not reason, it feels. Its dialectic is an instinct; its logic, an impression; its conclusion, a tear! They are acquainted with no more of J. J. Rousseau than the first hundred pages of the *Savoyard Vicar*, and some chapters of the *Confessions*, in which he describes a talented watchmaker struggling with his misery and the sentiments which he is-conscious exist within him. Of Chateaubriand they read only *Réné* and *Atala*, in which philosophy is moistened with tears, and piety is based upon love.

"Look at our dramas. They have been written for courts or for the exclusively literate classes. A proof that the people do not feel that they are sufficiently adapted to their wants is, that they have invented melodramas for themselves, because their true drama has not yet been invented for them. So our dramas are useless!

"There are our men of science! they write in algebra, and use a Gallo-Grecian terminology, which leaves the natural sciences in the state of mysteries to all who are not initiated. The man who will translate the discoveries of science into the vulgar tongue, and thus make them known to the ignorant, has not yet appeared. I mistake; such a man has appeared in England, in the son of Herschel. In France there is none

XXI.

"Thus, of all that constitutes a complete library for a man of the world, or for an academy, we can find scarcely five or six French volumes adapted to the use and to the understand-

ing of illiterate families in town or country, and even these were not written with an express reference to this neglected portion of the population. We teach them to read, but we do not give them, afterwards, a chance of reading anything further, unless it be books intended for other readers, or publications stained with vice and cynicism, which, like edge-tools, when placed in the hands of children, serve only to injure them."

XXII.

These reflections profoundly touched me as I looked at the candid and sorrowful countenance of poor Reine, whose thirsty soul sought in vain for pure fountains wherein she might quench her natural longing after knowledge and love. I said to her:

"But, in your opinion, Reine, how should we compose a library that would be suited to families of your condition? Here is a catalogue; look, and try to choose a library for yourself."

We tried together, and we could not find any more than the five or six volumes that I have already mentioned.

"They must be invented, sir, for decidedly they do not exist in the language; there are hundreds and thousands of books for such as you, but for us there are only a few pages."

"Perhaps," replied I, "the time for writing them has now arrived, for now that everybody knows how to read—now that everybody, under the influence of a morality which is evidently on the increase among the masses, is devoting to intellectual enjoyments the time he formerly wasted on vice and debauchery; now that general competency is augmenting by the augmentation of labour and of industry; now that the Government is being forced to become more comprehensive, and to call on every man to apply to the service of his country a small portion of right, choice, will, and intelligence; all these things suppose and necessitate the consecration of an infinitely more important portion of time to reading, that solitary instruction in the interior of every family. The mind and the soul are about to redouble their labours in all classes of society; books are the tools of this moral labour, and men must have tools adapted to their purpose."

"This is very true," said she.

XXIII.

"Now, while so many motives increase the obligation of reading among the people, the necessity and the faculty of writing are also increasing in an equal proportion among the educated classes. For one author that there was formerly, there are now a hundred or a thousand."

"How is that?" she asked, with a look of wonder.

"For the very same reason that induced you to write your verses to your goldfinch, and your other little compositions,—because there is more thought, more feeling, more inspiration, more knowledge, more necessity for production among the educated classes of the present day than there was a century since. The Revolution has brought into cultivation many an uncultivated portion of the soil of humanity; that which formerly did not vegetate, is now flourishing—that which used to bear no fruit now yields abundantly: ideas have been sown, and intellects have sprung up.

"And then as classical education has been immensely diffused, there have issued forth year after year from our colleges bands of young men of talent, of thought, of style, who do not know what to do with these gifts, unless they acquire by them fortune, reputation, and glory. The Church which, under the old system, used to absorb them in large numbers, enriching them with its benefices and its lucrative functions of all kinds, can do so no longer; the Empire, which devoured them in its armies, no longer mows them down in regular sheaves. Two careers only are open to them—public functions and literature: they write newspapers, articles, romances, poems, books. The vast multitude of writers who thus press forward to the gates of renown, prevents our remarking the talents of every description that are drowned in the crowd; and perceiving how full of new sap, vigour, variety, originality, and genius, is this age which, like all other ages, has been accused of sterility. At the present time more labour and more literary talent are expended every morning in France and in Europe on the fragments which in the evening litter the floor of a coffee-house or reading-room, than would be necessary to compose an excellent book, and to lay a foundation for the renown of a great writer. I, myself, who now speak to you, receive every week more

poetry, more politics, and more philosophy confidentially through the post than could be contained in a thick volume. The human head and the human heart are two workshops, more full of activity and invention than they have ever been at any other epoch of humanity. Well, all this intellectual labour naturally seeks for employment. It has not yet found what it seeks, and therefore it frequently stirs up and disquiets the country, and threatens it with explosions; but it will find it, for, mark me, there is a Providence that watches over minds just as there is a Providence that directs the seasons. God does not bring into being more mouths than there are ears of corn, or more ears of corn than there are mouths. Everything corresponds with the rest in intellectual, as well as in physical, nature. Whenever a great want arises, you may be sure that there will speedily appear an equally great force to satisfy it; and when you behold a great force without employment, you may also be sure that some great want will soon arise to absorb it.

"Books for the people, as soon as it shall be understood that the people must and will read, will be, under all forms, the useful, honourable, and wholesome employment of that host of talents that must and will write. In proportion as political privileges rise to their proper level by means of liberal, electoral, constitutional, and republican institutions, in that same proportion will the minds of the people rise to their true level under the influence of popular education, instruction, and literature."

"Indeed, sir, you are right," said Reine; "I had never thought of that. Why, then, now that we all know how to read, do authors write only for drawing-rooms and academies? It cannot be because the *people* in town and country are not a larger public than the others, for it is said that we amount to I don't know how many millions of labourers, artisans, handicraftsmen, servants, women and children."

XXIV.

"Oh, Reine," replied I, "do not be cast down, the era of popular literature is approaching; and when I say popular, you will understand that I mean the most wholesome and the most pure of literatures, for by the people I understand

not what demagogues, but what God, the Gospel, and philosophers mean by the word. I look on the people as the most numerous, and, consequently, most important portion of humanity. Before ten years have elapsed, unless our new institutions suffer an eclipse to sterilize them, and convert them into a momentary tyranny, you will have a library for the people, popular science, journalism, and philosophy; poetry, history, and romances for the people—a library fitted to the minds, hearts, time and fortune of the people of every degree!"

"But who will make this library for us?" said she, with a mingled expression of joy and incredulity.

"Who will make it for you?" replied I; "the most illustrious of those who know, who think, who sing, who write. Just as it was an honour, some centuries ago, to instruct courts, to speak to kings, to please the only enlightened people that then existed in the world—so it will soon be an honour and a virtue to instruct the humble, to speak to the masses, to please the honest people, among whom a taste for the good and the beautiful will be propagated by instruction and reading. The glory will turn round with the audience, that is all. It was among the lofty—it will be with the lowly. Genius naturally turns away, in the direction of glory. Glory will then surround the name of a writer when uttered by the lips of your women, of your children, of your old men, in your cottages, in your garrets, and in your workshops. Why do men desire their writings to be read? Sometimes that they may be admired, but more frequently that they may be understood, sympathised with, and loved by those who read them. Well, will it not be more agreeable for a poet that his verses should live in the memories of thirty or forty millions of men, instead of on the splendid shelves of five or six thousand bookcases? Will it not be more gratifying to a writer to belong to the family of these thirty or forty millions of men, to be with them at their tables, in their workshops, at their plough, at their firesides, than to have a seat in an academy of forty individuals like himself, and a pension from the court or from the ministerial budget? What do you think yourself? Come, ask yourself the question. Which would you prefer, to know that your poems were in the mouths of a million of little children, who repeated them at the end of their prayers, or

before the knees of their mothers; or to know that they were printed on fine paper, and bound in splendid morocco on the bookshelves of some few lovers of poetry?"

"Oh, I should prefer to be remembered by children and poor people!" cried she; "that would be a living edition."

"Add, and a loving one," said I.

"Yes, that is what we must look for, is it not, madam?" replied she, turning towards my wife. "All glory that is not converted into friendship is like buds that do not blossom, and sunbeams that do not warm: Monsieur de Lamartine is right."

XXV.

I wished to go farther, and to discover the true literary taste and feeling of the people, in the heart of this excellent woman, who had been born among servants and lived among artizans. I therefore said to her:—

"What would you consider should be the nature of works that would be suited to the manners, the sentiments, the minds of people of your rank in life? What would be the first and the best books that an author, possessed of the requisite talent, should compose in the first instance for peasants, servants, artizans, labourers, their wives and children, and indeed for all who have little to read, and who have hitherto read little?"

"Ah! sir, I hardly know; it would be very difficult to say. No one has any taste, unless it has been sometimes exercised."

"But judge for yourself, and answer me. What is the book that would be likely to interest, enthral, and powerfully and vividly impress your mind as it is, or rather as it was before you had read the books that were lent to you? Would it be a beautiful system of philosophy, at once religious and rational, establishing in short maxims, sublime and clear as the rays of the sun, the great principles of human wisdom, and of virtue perfected from age to age in the intellect and conscience of the human race; a catechism of the mind of men?"

"Yes," said she, without enthusiasm, "that would do no harm. But maxims . . . they are rather cold, sir, for us; they are pieces of thoughts that we turn over in our hands

for a moment to see them shine ; but they are not persons. We can attach ourselves only to persons, because we can either love or hate them ; but thoughts—they can be neither loved nor hated—they are dead ! We should prefer something else ?”

“A beautiful universal history,” continued I, “very clear, very consecutive, well narrated, ramified like the branches of that plane-tree before you, the roots of which should proceed from the earth, the trunk from the roots, the branches from the trunk, and the twigs from the branches, and which should teach you to follow with your eye all the great families of the human race, from the earliest times to the present day, exhibiting the progress, the falls, the deaths, and the resurrections of the races of men, of ideas, of religions, of institutions, of arts, and of trades ?—would that suit you ?”

“Not all of us, sir ; nevertheless that would be a great boon to young men with a little education, and old men that are curious to know past events ; but the mass, the women, the girls, the children, would not read such a book very much. It is too far beyond our sphere ; it has nothing to do with us ; it passes before our eyes like a torrent, dazzling and drowning our minds ; we should prefer a handful of water drawn from a smaller source within our reach. That which is great is great, but like the sky to our eyes, it is confused, and, as the saying is, we can see nothing but stars there.”

“An abridgment of all the various arts and sciences, explained simply and clearly, in such a manner as to unfold to you all that man has discovered, invented, imagined or perfected in every department of art and industry—that would do. That would give you an idea of yourselves, would inspire you with respect for your power, and make you hope and desire always to go on improving, so as to surpass all preceding ages ; and besides, that would destroy many false notions that you entertain with regard to a number of natural or artificial phenomena, which you consider to be the result of witchcraft.”

“Yes, sir, that too would be useful ; but it would only please the studious among us, and we have very little time to study. And then, when we had read the book, what would remain to us ? A cloud of words, of lines, of things,

of facts and of machines, that would get jumbled together in our brains. It is enough for us to understand our own trade, we have no necessity to learn the trades of everybody else."

"Beautiful poems like those of Virgil, Homer, and Tasso, which relate in verse the battles of heroes, the sieges and conflagrations of cities, the destruction of armies, the conquest of nations?"

"We should not read those at all, sir. They were all very well in the time of the Greeks and Romans, when nations thought about nothing but fighting, and the people believed in all sorts of fables about gods and goddesses, and demi-gods that came down from heaven to fight for this party or against that. Now, the people do not believe in these fabrications of the poets; they desire their poets to sing about the true and the good, or they will not listen to them."

"Fine romances, in which we behold ladies and gentlemen, who love one another, who talk to one another, who write love-letters, who deceive each other, who quarrel, who are reconciled, and who finish, after four volumes of misunderstandings and adventures, by getting married and living rich and happy in a splendid mansion in Paris or London?"

"You might as well talk to us in Chinese or Japanese, sir, for all that we could understand of what you said. Romances about ladies'-maids and dress-makers, we should read with pleasure. There are, however, many writers who write more novels of this sort than we want; and would to Heaven that they would throw away their pens, or write on other subjects? for their stories are the pests of the poor mothers of honest families. They are always looking into the pockets of their sons or daughters, to find these mischievous little books, and throw them into the fire. Is it possible that there are writers of talent who amuse themselves by thus sowing poison in young hearts, just as really as if they were to throw arsenic on to the flowers of a nosegay, that people might inhale death when they thought to refresh themselves with delicious perfume? Oh! no. But in this consists the evil: plenty of books are written for us to read, but they are books against us! And then these gentlemen go and talk about poor people who sell their children; but who made the money with which they are bought, if they did not, with their penny romances?"

"But simple stories, that should be at once true and interesting, depicting the homes, the habits, the professions, the families, the miseries and the joys of the people, and written almost in their language; a species of unframed mirror of their own existence, in which they might see themselves in all their simplicity and in all their candour; but which, instead of reflecting their coarseness and their vices, should in preference reflect their kindly feelings, their labours, their affections, and their virtues, with a view to increase their self-respect, and to lead them to aspire after moral and literary perfection? What do you think of that?"

"Ah! sir," cried she, "I think those are the very books that would interest artizans, and above all, their wives and daughters. And, as you well know that the women give the tone to all the family, it follows that when the wife or the daughter of the house reads a book, it is just the same as if the father and the son had read it. We are the soul of the house, sir; what we love, the walls love. The instructor of the mind is the schoolmaster; but the instructor of the soul is at the fireside. It is the mother, the wife, the daughter or the sister of the honest workman who are his real *Muses*, as they call those guardian angels at the academy of Marseilles. The air that they breathe is breathed by all their relations, and by their friends too. It is they, as I have so often seen in a working man's family of an evening, who choose the book, light the candle, and say: 'I am going to read a story to you; so listen attentively!'"

"The scenes of these tales should be laid among the class of people by whom they are intended to be read, should they not?"

"Yes, sir, or they would be no use to us. People would say—'That is too high for us; don't let us trouble our heads about it!'"

"They must also be true?"

"Yes, sir. We are not very fond of imaginative pieces, because we have very little imagination ourselves. We only take an interest in that which is true, because we live in a world of realities, and truth is our poetry."

"These stories must also be very simple and very natural; and they must contain scarcely no events or adventures, so that they may more closely resemble the ordinary course of things—must they not?"

"Yes, sir; because there are scarcely do events or adventures in our life, and some two or three feelings constitute the whole of our existence."

"And they must also be in prose?"

"Yes, sir; that is more simple for us to read. We like to be talked to as we talk ourselves. Authors ought to keep verses for songs, for prayers, or, as I do, for laments over the dead, regrets for the absent, recollections of by-gone times, and groans over eternal separations; because verses, you know, do not speak, do not narrate well, but they weep, and sing, and pray in us like a voice in the heart that does not speak every day, but only when it has been unusually stricken or moved."

"Then, these books must be sold very cheap, so that a week's reading must not cost a working man so much as a single night at the public house?"

"Oh! yes, certainly," said Reine approvingly, "a book like those of which we are speaking, must not cost more than a bottle of wine, a game at cards, a cup of coffee, or a pipe of tobacco. Then the father or the brother will say: 'There is some wine that I may drink, or some tobacco that I may smoke all alone by myself, and when I have done, nothing will remain in my glass or in my pipe; and there by my side, for the same price, is a volume that will make time pass pleasantly to my wife, my children, and myself, and that will remain in the house afterwards, leaving pleasure in our memory, gentle tears in our eyes, and good feelings in our hearts. Come, which shall I buy?' And he will buy the volume, sir, unless he is a selfish man, a hard-hearted man, or a debauchee. And then again he will make another simple calculation. If he reckons rightly, he will say: 'If I go and spend my evenings away from home, in some public place, it will cost me perhaps as much as I earn in two or three days, whereas, if I pass them at home with my children and my neighbours in reading a good book, it will only cost me the expense of a candle, and I shall save my money as well as improve my mind and polish my manners?' Is not that true, sir?"

"Perfectly true; and such a reflection could emanate only from you, who are aware of the value of a working man's time. So, the books ought to be short, ought they not?"

"Yes, sir; about as long as a candle will last, not longer, because working men have no other time for reading besides the Sunday, and if the story were not finished before bedtime, a week would pass before it could be resumed, and it would in the meanwhile be forgotten. They would not know where they left off, and on the next Sunday they would not recollect names and things. Only men of leisure can read books in several volumes; they take their leisure wholesale, as they buy their provisions from the grocer. As for us, we can only take it retail; an ounce of salt, a page of reading, a tear drop! Penny by penny, such are the people: we must take them as God made them!"

XXVI.

This conversation inspired me with a determination to endeavour to fill up, however imperfectly, the programme sketched out by this interesting young woman, by some tales in prose, and some popular songs, for the Sundays of the people who are hungering after something to read, but who as yet have no writers peculiarly their own. I have lived much with peasants, sailors, working men, and the good and faithful servants who form a part of our families; I have passed many hours in cottages, in barracks, on the decks of ships, on the roadside, on the mountains with the shepherds, behind the plough with the labourer, in the vineyards with the vine-dressers, beside the hedges on our high roads, talking familiarly with these natural, good and simple-minded persons, whose language, manners, and feelings are much more familiar to me than those of polite society. I have been a witness or confidant of seven or eight lives, which, though obscure, were so full of interest, and of hidden joys or griefs, that, if they were related as they have been felt, they would prove true little poems of the human heart. I know their scenes, their events, their actors. I intend to try and write them as simply as they were related to me. I shall publish them one by one, in single volumes, at a low price, so as to make them accessible to the poorest families. I shall infuse into them neither pretension of style, nor attempt at talent, nor spirit of system; for I shall aim at nothing but nature. That is the only genius required for

this sort of productions. The people feel it even more acutely than we do. If they find it in these artless pictures, they will approve of them, and desire to have more. More liberal and fresher hands will lavishly supply them. Popular literature will be sketched out; it must commence and finish only with works of feeling, for while the literate classes of our population are nothing but intellect, the illiterate classes are nothing but heart! By influencing the heart, then, we must raise the people to a taste for, and cultivation of, literature. The Gospel of feeling is like the Gospel of holiness, it must be first preached to the simple, and in a language as simple as the heart of a child.

XXVII.

These ideas, which I thought aloud in the presence of the dressmaker of Aix, recalled to my mind some pages that I had written many years before, as if by presentiment, upon the method of conceiving and writing history for the people. I looked for these pages in my portfolio, and read them to her. They are as follows:—

“Until now, the people have been greatly flattered. This shows that as yet they are not estimated at their true worth; for we only flatter those whom we wish to seduce. Why have they been flattered? Because they have been made a means instead of an end. It has been said:—‘The people possess strength; we need this to overthrow oppressive governments or to absorb the nationalities that we covet; let us call the people to our aid, let us make them intoxicated with self-esteem; let us tell them that right is on the side of numbers, that their will takes the place of justice, that God is with large battalions, that glory is the amnesty of history, that all means are good when employed in securing the triumph of the popular cause, and that even crimes disappear before the greatness and the holiness of the results attained. They will believe us, they will follow us, they will lend us their brute force; and when, by the aid of their arm, of their blood, and even of their crimes, we have overturned tyranny and thrown Europe into confusion, we will disband the people, and say to them: ‘Be silent, labour, and obey!’... This is the way in which the people have been hitherto ad-

dressed; this is how the vices of courts have been introduced into the streets, and such a taste for adulation and craving after complaisance and caresses have been given to the people that, like certain sovereigns of the Lower Empire, they will allow you to speak to them only on your knees. This should not be so; they must be spoken to, erect, on a level, face to face. They are worth neither more nor less than the other elements of a nation. Number has nothing to do with the matter. Take one by one the individuals who compose a crowd, and what do you find? The same ignorance, the same errors, the same passions and often the same vices as you meet with elsewhere. Do you find anything worth kneeling to? No. Multiply as often as you please all this ignorance, all these vices, these passions, and these miseries by millions of men, and you will not have changed their nature; you will only have a greater multitude. Let us then set numbers aside, and respect nothing but the truth.

"It is in face of the truth alone that you must place yourself in writing history for the use of the people; and do not think that you will be less widely read, less attentively listened to, and less popular for doing so. The people have two depraved tastes, adulation and falsehood; but they have also two natural tastes, truth and courage. They respect those who dare to brave them, but they despise those who fear them. There are some wild beasts that devour only those who fly or who fall before them. The people are like the lion, whom you must not approach sideways, but face to face, fixing your eyes on his eyes, laying your hands on his mane, with that bold and confident familiarity which proves that though you never incur you know your own strength, and which says to the multitude: 'However greatly you may value yourselves, I know my own worth.'

"This being premised, from what point of view will you choose to write this popular history? There are three principal points on which you may place yourself: glory, patriotism, and civilization, or the morality of the actions which you are about to relate. If you select glory, you will greatly please a warlike nation, which has been dazzled instead of being enlightened; and which this dazzling has frequently blinded to the worth of the men and the things that have shone above the horizon. If you write from the

exclusive point of view of patriotism, you will delight a people whose only excuse for its sublime egotism is its safety and its grandeur, and which, feeling itself so strong and so great, has been led to think that it stands alone, and that Europe is summed up in it. But neither of these two points of view will give you the complete, that is, the general truth; they will only give you the French truth. Now, the French truth is current only at Paris; cross the frontier, and it is a lie. You would not wish to consecrate your instruction, or to reduce the intelligence of a people, to a truth thus bounded by the limits of a nation. What then remains for you to choose? The universal and permanent point of view, that is, the point of view of the morality of the individual or national actions that you have to describe. All others are enlightened by a false and conventional light; this alone is illuminated by a complete and divine light; this alone can guide the uncertainty of human judgment through the labyrinth of prejudices, of opinions, of passions, of personal and national egotism, and make the people say: 'This is good, this bad, this noble.' In a word, if you would form the judgment of the masses, and destroy their trust in the immoral theory of success, do something that has never yet been done; *give a conscience to history*. This is the watchword of the age, this a work worthy of the people, and an enterprise worthy of yourself! By such an historic proceeding, you will perhaps less immediately please the passionate imagination of the masses; but you will serve their cause, their interests, and their reason, a thousand times better. You will everywhere find these three aspects: the purely individual aspect of glory, the exclusively national aspect of patriotism, and the moral aspect of civilization. And by submitting the sense of every event to the scrutiny of a rigorous logic, you will always arrive at this result,—that glory and even patriotism, when separated from the general morality of the action, are unproductive as regards the nation itself and the real progress of the human race; and that, in a word, there is no glory opposed to honour, no patriotism opposed to humanity, and no success antagonistic to justice.

"What a fine commentary upon Providence would be a history thus written for the use of the masses! And I add: What a blessing to the people, and what a pledge of its

future power, would be put into its hand with such a book ! To teach the people by the facts, the devotedness, the hidden sense of these great historic dramas, in which men see only the decorations and the actors, but the plan of which is arranged by an invisible hand; to teach the people by these things to know itself, to judge itself, to govern itself; to render it capable of discriminating those who serve it from those who lead it astray—those who dazzle it from those who enlighten it; to lay its hand on every man, on every great event in its own history, and say to it: ‘Weigh thyself, not by the false weight of thy ephemeral passions, of thy prejudices, of thy anger, of thy national vanity, of thy narrow patriotism, but by the just and true weight of the universal conscience of the human race, and the utility of the action as regards civilization;’ to convince it that history is not a chance, a confused medley of men and things, but an onward progress through centuries, in which each nationality has its post, its duty, its divine action assigned to it, in which every social class has its importance in the eyes of God; to teach the people by these means to respect itself religiously, as it were, with a consciousness of what it is about, for the progressive accomplishment of the great designs of Providence, in a word, to create in it a moral sense, and to exercise this moral sense upon all reigns, upon all men, and upon itself: I venture to say that you would thus give to the people much more than empire, much more than power, much more than government; you would give it a conscience, a judgment, and a sovereignty over itself, and thus place it above all governments. When the day arrives on which it will be worthy to reign, it will reign. Governments are only the mould into which the statue of a people is cast, and in which it assumes the form which its more or less perfected nature permits. As is the people, so will be the government, you may be sure; and when a people complains of its own, it is because it is not worthy of another. This is the decision at which Tacitus arrived respecting the age in which he lived: it is still true with regard to our own times.”

XXVIII.

"Well!" said I to Reine, "these are the ideas that I entertained with regard to literature, history, poetry, philosophy, science, dramas for the people, long before the period of which I am speaking to you. To this point we must come. Nothing is too lofty, nothing too beautiful for the masses. Writers are wanting for the people, but readers are not lacking for writers. Ah! if I had the talent of some authors of the present day, and their youth, and their leisure, and their facility of composition, what would I not do in this order of ideas! There is a new world to discover, without going, like Christopher Columbus, across the Atlantic. This new world is the sensibility and the reason of the masses! The geography of the moral universe will not be complete until this popular continent shall be discovered, conquered, and peopled with ideas by the navigators of thought. Glimpes of it have already been caught, it remains only to sail up to its shores."

"That which you have been saying to me is very poetical, sir," replied the dressmaker with a smile; "and yet I understand it."

"Pardon me," said I, "I should not have talked in this strain before another woman of your condition; but you are a poet too, your verses have made me forget your scissors! Besides, to be popular one need not be prosaic; the people is a great poet also, for it is as yet the unweaned child of nature, and nature speaks only in images!"

XXIX.

Meanwhile the sea breeze was imperceptibly falling upon the waves to give place to the land wind, which was beginning to blow through the pines along the coast; the tops of the waves were becoming rose-coloured, like snow when shone upon by the last rays of the setting sun. The night was falling fast though we had not perceived it, so engrossed had we been by our conversation with this simple village maid. The diligence for Aix was ready to start; my wife embraced Reine as though she had been an old acquaintance. She thanked us warmly for the reception we had given her,

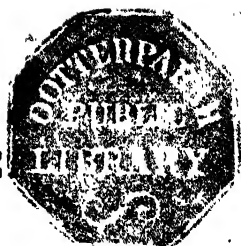
and left us well satisfied with the manner in which she had spent the day, and assuring us that she should say nothing about it to her neighbours, for fear that they would consider her an *intriguer*. But her timid and candid countenance rendered it impossible for any one to see in her anything but what she was, a simple-hearted woman endowed with a sensitive imagination and an immense fund of goodness.

At the moment that she was passing the threshold of the garden gate to get into the diligence, I called her back, and said to her:

“Reine! if ever I write one or two of those popular tales of which you have given me the idea, you will allow me to dedicate the first to you, will you not? Your name will secure its good fortune!”



GENEVIEVE



THE imagination is the mirror of nature, a mirror that we carry within ourselves, and in which nature is depicted. The finest imagination is the clearest and truest mirror, that which we tarnish the least with the breath of our own inventions, that which we colour the least with the artificial, and too frequently false, tints of our fancy, or, as we call it, our genius. Genius does not create, it retraces; God alone is able to create. Homer, the greatest and the most pathetic imagination that ever described nature, and caused the human heart to palpitate, is nothing more than a perfect copyist. The colours he dilutes with our tears upon his palette are only the colours we all behold, and the tears we all shed. He saw them best, and felt them best; and in this consists his genius. Poets, who are accused of being collectors of fictions, and reciters of falsehoods, are the truest of all men. They observe, they feel, and they write; they change the names of their personages, that is their only invention; but if those personages did not really exist in nature, they would never have conceived them, and if they had not really conceived them in their imagination, they would not bring them forth, or they would bring forth only monsters and phantoms. Every poem then is a truth.

In the *Confidences*, I have related the real adventure that I afterwards described in the domestic poem of *Jocelyn*. The readers of the *Confidences* remember the poor and interesting village vicar to whom, in my verses, I have given the name of *Jocelyn*; they remember also the beautiful young girl to whom I gave the name of *Laurence*. I allowed myself to make no other alteration of the truth in that little drama,—a chimney-picture that one hangs up on a nail in one's room or one's garret, and looks at for recreation, when desirous to recall the scenes of one's youth, to dream, to weep, or to pray.

Many young people, of both sexes, have written to me from all quarters of the globe with regard to this poem, which has obtained the only success that it was possible for it to achieve, a success in sick hearts, a glory of intimacy, an immortality by the fireside, *musa pedestris*! All these touched hearts, all these broken voices, all these trembling pens, asked me if this drama were true; if Jocelyn had lived, if Laurence had so loved and died; if I had known them, if I had had within me or around me the sad and holy secret of their loves and their misfortunes; if they were to take an interest in them merely as imaginary personifications of sentiments born in my dreams, or whether they might truly weep and pray over their tombs, and attach themselves to them as to two beings who had really lived among us, and whom we might hope one day to meet again, loving, beloved, and happy in another life? O holy simplicity of sensitive hearts! They will not waste their sensibility upon a fiction, and they are right. Tears are too precious to be thus thrown away upon chimeras,—a real shade must hear them fall, and gather them up. To deceive such hearts is a sin, a crime without remission to poets, for it is an offence against nature: it is laying a snare for melancholy, in order to laugh in her face when she weeps, it is to make tears rain upon the sand in order to water an illusion. It is wrong; and it often, very often, does a real injury to the tender imaginations thus deceived. For fresh and simple souls (and these are the most beautiful) often take seriously to heart the sentiments with which the poet thus plays. We remember the seven or eight suicides that *Werther*, that ironical composition of Goethe, caused in Germany, after the appearance of that interesting book; we know that Bernardin de St. Pierre was besieged all his life by epistolary interrogations regarding Paul and Virginia, and that pilgrims have worn a track to the imaginary tomb under the palm-trees. I myself, though my writings are far from having spread this contagion among the imaginations of Europe, have had my share of this correspondence with the unemployed and meditative minds of my time. I have perceived by certain unmistakeable signs, that I have sometimes touched true and strong chords. The reaction has sometimes gone even so far as passionate anger. Thus, since I pub-

lished last year the episode of *Graziella*, a true history, in which I describe myself with the impartial severity of distance and of time, I have received a host of letters, anonymous and otherwise, full of deep reproaches, of maledictions, and imprecations against the hardness, the insensibility, and the levity of heart of which I accuse myself in this recital towards that beautiful and unfortunate girl.

Now that the *Confidences* have answered the enquiries about Laurence and Jocelyn, I have been interrogated regarding the accessory details of the drama—about the landscapes, the secondary personages, the weaver, the bishop, the friend, the servant, even the dog and the birds. Many have wished to know whence poor Martha came, and whither she went after the death of the vicar, and if Martha was her true name; and if her fondness and devotion to her master were not an invention of the poet, a grey and pleasant colour thrown in to relieve the picture, a harmony adapted to that Alpine nature, and that hopeless life? I have twenty times answered these questions in conversation; and take this opportunity of replying more explicitly, for the satisfaction of a still larger number of inquirers. No; Martha was not the true name of Jocelyn's servant, any more than Jocelyn was the real name of the vicar himself, or that Valneige was the name of the village in which he lived. Her name was, and still is, Genevieve, for she did not follow her young master to the tomb, and I see her still from time to time, in the court, under the lime-trees, on summer-days, when I am passing by the almshouses of C * * *. This is her uneventful history, short and dull as a winter's day, in which the sun shines for one hour between the two long twilights. I remember the conversation during which she told it me, as well as if it had been yesterday. I have received from heaven a memory for places, countenances, and tones of voice, upon which time has no effect. Twenty years are to me, in this respect, as a single night. This memory relates to external things. But for impressions, attachments, sentiments, heart-feelings, I need no memory. They never cease to resound within me. They have not been, they are; the past is not to me a time to be spoken of, all is present. A shock imparted to my faculty of feeling is perpetuated, reverberated, and continually renewed in my nature, without

being weakened. The pendulum of my memory never needs to be re-arranged, but always preserves the same oscillation. I have, really, in my internal fibres, that mystery of perpetual motion which mechanical philosophers so vainly seek. It was this that early inspired me with a conviction of the immateriality of the soul, and of the infinite. I feel sure that I shall not mistake in reference to one circumstance, or detail, or word, or tone of voice, in repeating to-day for you my conversation with Genevieve. But, first, let me draw her portrait. This is more difficult, for words express, but the pencil alone paints. I can use language only, and no pencil.

CONVERSATION WITH GENEVIEVE.

II.

I spent several days at the parsonage of B——, after the death and burial of the Abbé D——, whom I have named Jocelyn in my verses. I had to perform the very melancholy, but very easy, duties of testamentary executor, and even of heir, for the dying man had left to me the settlement of his little debts. They had all been contracted during the years of disease and famine, when he had gone to buy medicines from the druggists, and rice and sugar from the grocers of the little town of G——, for the use of the sick. But there was an inventory to be taken, books to pack up, papers to examine, some poor articles of furniture and clothing to be sold or given away; the servant, the dog, and the birds, to be provided for; and lastly, the house and garden to be put in order, that everything might present an air of decency, cleanliness, and neatness in the eyes of the vicar who would come to fill his place, and that no noxious weed, no straws or feathers might be negligently left to soil the nest from which the snow-white swan had just flown.

During the days thus employed in pious cares for the memory of my friend, I had no company but Genevieve. She was coming and going all day long, from the court to the garden, from the well to the wood-stack, from the cellar to the garret, from the dog-kennel to the dove-cote and the

hen-coops. She would take the spade and rake into one of the corners of the garden, to weed among the cabbages and the lettuces, or to level the paths, the gravel of which had become incrustated with greenish moss during the illness of Jocelyn ; soon she would lay these gardening tools aside to take her broom and clean from the least speck of dust the remotest corners of the staircase or the passages ; then she laid down her broom to take a duster and wipe and rub the furniture and the stone mantel-shelves, until the walnut presses and the outer surface of the deal tables became mirrors in which she could see the reflection of her face ; then she left the furniture and resumed her needle and thread to repair the chasubles, the altar-cloths, the small fine napkins with which the priest wipes the top of the chalice after he has drunk the mystic wine ; then she used to jump up from her chair, throw the linen over her arm, and go and stir the fire, skim the earthen pot that stood on the hearth, open the door of the court, and look towards the sacristy to see if her master were not returning as usual at dinner-time. The dog, who used to go out with her, would go smelling towards the grave that had been freshly covered with earth ; howl two or three times at the edge of the grave, as if to wake his master ; then return slowly, frequently stopping and looking back, his head bent down, his eyes sad, his ears pricked up, one in front, the other behind, as though astonished at not bringing after him some one who was always expected. Genevieve would then call to the dog in a tone of melancholy impatience, make him return into the court, and then ascend, with tearful eyes, the outside staircase. For some minutes her step was no longer heard in the house. She was weeping alone in the kitchen, from which she would presently issue to go and cut some grass for the goat. You would have said that a disturbed spirit drove her from one place to another, as if to seek in spite of herself something which she could nowhere find. Oh ! God alone knows the void which the disappearance of a solitary individual creates in the heart of a poor woman, of an only friend, of a dog, in a birdcage, in a house, in a garden, and even in nature, living or dead, in the little circle immediately around him ! Whilst no one imagines that a breath is wanting to the world, air and

life are wanting to two or three beings whose existence depended upon the departed one ! All are held together by the cement of old and cherished customs ; take away a grain of sand, and the wall crumbles down ; when the wall has crumbled down, what becomes of the moss that used to drape it ? When the moss is dried up, what becomes of the insect's nest, and the lizard's covert ? Around the heart of the most isolated man there is an invisible world that lives upon it. When that heart is cold, what becomes of this world ? That which the poor servant became—a soul in pain, a look without seeing, an eternal movement without an object, an activity without repose, a mechanical life, a living death. Such was Genevieve.

III.

I have always contemplated with pious respect and melancholy tenderness that class which was called the slave or freedman in antiquity, the nurse in Greece, and in the middle ages the *domestic*, that is, so to speak, the living part of the house, the *domus* in France, the *family* in Italy and Spain,—a fit name of domesticity, for the domestic is in reality only the complement, the extension of that dear and tender unity of human associations which is called the family ; they are the family without the ties of blood, the family of adoption, the temporary, annual family, the paid portion of the family, if you will ; but they are frequently as much bound up in it, as loving, as disinterested, as much paid by the wages of feeling, as devoted to the consideration, the honour, the interest, the perpetuation of the house, as the house itself. What do I say ? Often much more so. I was early in life struck by that phrase of the historian of the sanguinary proscriptions of the Roman Triumvirate of Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus. He relates the spoliations, the massacres, the nocturnal flights, the refuges sought in caves, forests, and friends' houses ; the ingratitude, cowardice, and perfidy of false friends ; the sales of the proscribed by those with whom they sought hospitality, secrecy, and safety ; the victims drawn into snares, bought, sold, and handed over by their denouncers to the sword of the executioners of Octavius—and he concludes his enumeration of

three or four thousand assassinations, with that summary which has not been sufficiently studied by those who appreciate human nature, not by the heart, but by the social condition.

"Fact eternally notable!" says Velleius Paterculus. "During these proscriptions the fidelity of the mothers and wives was perfect and sublime, that of the freedmen variable and uncertain; the sons were basely unfaithful, for many to gratify their cupidity betrayed their fathers, while the fidelity of the domestic slaves was admirable and almost general!"

It was thus, also, during the French proscriptions of 1793 and 1794; out of ten proscribed persons, nine were concealed by the devotedness of their domestics. The family was saved by the domestics. Humanity owes an eternal monument to this class. And what is not owed to it by the heart of families, of children, of old men? And what does not polity itself owe to it if it were wise enough to give the domestic his true place in civilization?

Consequently, during the few days that I held the executive power, when the question was mooted in the deliberations of the Government, whether the right of voting should be granted or denied to domestics, I was far from imitating the unwise severity of the Convention, which excluded every individual of this class from the right of suffrage and the privileges of a citizen; a brutal and blind act of legislation, which re-converted into slaves those whom nature had made more than freemen—children, sons, brothers, friends by adoption. I said: honour the domestic, and you will strengthen the family, that pivot of all moral democracy; for the domestic is to the family what the interior court is to the house. Do you wish to give millions of votes to the holy influence of the home circle? Do you wish your elections to be inspired by a family spirit? Do you wish the interests of conservation to prevail over the spirit of disorder? Do you wish to counterbalance by thoughtful, religious, and representative votes, the thoughtless, turbulent, and tumultuous suffrages of those floating masses that ferment or stray over the surface of your population? Do you wish to do more? Do you wish to infuse heart into your electoral institutions, and give to feeling the part that it has in human

nature and that it ought to have in popular legislation? Extend the suffrage, then, to domestics; you will thus give ten votes instead of one to the father of a family; you will give a vote to the women, to the old men, to the children, to virtue, morality, and good habits—a vote to the whole house! The electoral suffrage given to the denizens of the fireside, will be the salutary corrective of the abuses and mistakes of universal suffrage improperly exercised. The aristocracy of antiquity did not understand this, because they had none but slaves; the feudal lords did not understand it, because they had only serfs; but as for us, we have a free domesticity, servants, both men and women, grafted upon the trunk of the family by dwelling together, and by mutual attachment, who display fidelity frequently equalling that of sons or daughters. For if there are ties of kindred, there are other ties no less strong, knit around the same fireside.

Domesticity, in the middle ages, gave the same proofs of relationship and devotion to the family which the old servant Eumœus, in Homer, gives to the master of the house, Ulysses, when revisiting the home which had been usurped during his absence. In the beautiful and pathetic *History of Mary Stuart*, by M. Dargaud, there occurs a tale of the fidelity of an old nurse, which I can never read without blessing domesticity, and honouring it in my heart. This is the story:—

“The Duke of Norfolk, a relation of Queen Elizabeth, and heir to her throne, fell in love with the modern Cleopatra, the captive of Holyrood, the beautiful and unfortunate Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. He conspired with his vassals to take her from her prison, and raise her to the throne as his wife. Elizabeth discovered the secret of his love, disclosed the plot, arrested Norfolk, and condemned him to be beheaded in the Tower of London. The duke, accompanied by those of his friends who had been allowed to console the dying man, advanced proudly towards the place of punishment. When he had arrived at the foot of the scaffold, feeling thirsty, he asked for something to drink. An old woman, thickly veiled, who had followed him in tears, presented to him a cup, which the duke immediately recognised. It was his own drinking-cup, the cup of his ancestors; and this woman, provident and attentive even to death, was his nurse, an old servant of the family. She poured some ale into the

cup, the dying man took it and moistened his lips. When he returned the empty cup to the poor woman, she seized his hand, kissed it, and bathed it with her tears. 'May God bless thee,' said the duke, 'and may my children venerate thee for that thou hast done!' Then feeling that he was becoming sad, at a time when he had need of all his fortitude, he rapidly ascended the steps of the scaffold, leaning on the arm of the Dean of St. Paul's."

Antiquity presents no more simple and touching picture than this cup, recognised at the hour of leaving all on earth, and this servant's hand ministering to her lord on the scaffold itself.

IV.

Genevieve appeared at this time to be about thirty-five or forty years old; but age was not legible upon her care-worn countenance. You felt that misery had early blown there, like the frost that nips a plant in spring, and leaves it to languish rather than to live through the rest of the season. She was tall, but somewhat stooping, and her chest was sunken, through the habitual position of a girl who is sewing from morning to night. Her arms were thin, her fingers long and taper; and although her hands were always perfectly clean and white, the nail of the third finger of her right hand was marked at the extremity by a bluish stain, arising from the copper thimble which she almost always wore, and which had tinged the colour of her skin. She wore the costume of the peasant-women of those mountains; a dress of thick blue stuff, trimmed round the seams with an edging of amaranth-coloured velvet. A white head-dress, bordered with very wide lace lappets that flapped against her cheeks, scarcely allowed a glimpse of her hair, which was braided over her temples and hidden beneath her cap. Her delicate and sickly features were devoid of colour. Beneath her clear and transparent skin, you could perceive no blood ridden or circulate; the small blue veins that ramified over her temples were flattened just like ducts which the sap, partially exhausted, has not strength to swell out. Her cheeks were barely covered with a skin that was imperceptibly wrinkled through the influence of the keen atmosphere. Her eyes, fringed with long black lashes, were very beautiful,

although deeply sunken beneath the lids. They were surrounded with a black border, like eyes that have watched and wept very much. Their colour was a light blue ; you could look into them without their moving, as you look into a shady stream ; you could penetrate their very depths, and see there nothing but simplicity, sensibility, and languor. These beautiful young eyes, that might have belonged to a woman of lofty and aristocratic race, seemed, as it were, out of place in her already faded and aged countenance. Her lips, rather large and depressed at the corners, were slightly folded when she closed them. But as soon as they were opened, either to speak to her birds, or to say a kind word to the poor women of the village as they passed by the window, those open lips displayed teeth as white as pebbles from a fountain, and a smile in which melancholy mingled with goodness. The whole expression of her countenance was contained in her mouth, through which her heart seemed to open and diffuse itself over all her features. The tone of her voice revealed that internal trembling of a fibre that has been broken by perpetual emotion of the heart. It was a plaintive accent that seemed always to sing when she spoke. Her voice inspired at once calmness and emotion. I have never heard anything like it except among the cottages of the Valais, when asking my way or purchasing some milk of the old peasant women among the mountains. The excitement and continual gossiping in towns give a harsh and dissonant accent to the voice of women ; the solitude and serenity of the mountains renders it as sweet as a sigh, as accentuated as a sentiment, as sonorous and musical as a distant bell sounding through the woods. Such was the voice of Genevieve. As I sat reading in the garden, when she could not see me, I never grew tired of hearing her talk to her fowls, or sing in an under-tone as she knitted near the window to entertain the birds, who answered to her song. -

V.

* After the lapse of eight or ten days, she had grown so accustomed to my presence in the house that it no longer embarrassed her. She knew that I had been her master's dearest friend ; and she naturally transferred to me some of the

respectful attachment which she had felt for him. Besides, she could not be satisfied without serving some one, and loving him whom she served. Her service throughout was animated by a natural desire to oblige. She found her own happiness in anticipating the slightest wishes of those to whom her heart, even more than her state of servanthood, rendered her devoted. My youth, also, interested her ; she was proud to replace her dead master as far as she could, in giving a warm and kindly reception to a young man for whom she knew he entertained great affection. She kept up the honour of the house and the grace of hospitality even after the house had become empty, and the host had departed to another habitation. Nothing was neglected. Her master had informed her of the simplicity of my tastes ; and never, even in my own mother's house, had they been attended to so completely and so graciously. Never had my books and papers been more religiously allowed to remain as I had left them, upon my wooden table ; never had the logs, which during the day smouldered under the ashes, been more carefully drawn together in the evening, to impart a pleasant warmth to the room ; never had my dogs been provided with a thicker mat of straw to lie upon at the foot of my bed, or clearer water to drink ; and never, on my return from my long hunting excursions in the woods, had I more punctually found the maize-meal simmering in the saucepan, the potatoes roasting in the ashes, the cabbages, turnips, and melons from the garden, cooking on the hearth, and the sweet, fresh, rye-bread upon a napkin of unbleached linen in the tray ; the butter or honey from the plain had never been so yellow and unctuous, so carefully prepared in the dairy, or so neatly served up at table. This was the diet to which I had been habituated in the country, during my childhood, by a wise and tender mother ; the diet of the Carthusian friars, sweetened by the tenderness and grace of woman.

VI.

According to the custom among these mountains, we used to take our evening meal in the kitchen, on the only long and narrow table of massive walnut-wood that there was in the house. At the end of this table, Genevieve, as in the lifetime of

her master, spread the table-cloth, placed my plate and my tin cover, and arranged the dishes, the wine, and the bread. I sat down on one of the wooden benches that stood on each side of the table. At the other end, there was no table-cloth laid, only a porringer and an earthen plate, from which the servant used to take her soup and her portion of bacon, melon, salad, or cabbage, at the same time with myself; but, according to the custom of the country, she ate standing, holding her porringer in her hand, while she continued to wait upon me, coming and going, as during the rest of the day, stirring the fire, beating the butter, roasting the chestnuts, throwing pieces of bread to the dog, who sat before her, watching her intently, and never losing sight of her hand. I sought in no degree to constrain her in her conduct towards me, at once respectful and familiar, as my housekeeper. It would have embarrassed and humiliated her to make her sit down opposite me. I used simply to chat with her, eating my supper slowly, with my elbows resting on the table, after the fashion of a tified mountaineer.

After supper I drew near the fire, which she replenished every now and then with crackling logs of pine-wood. I then dried by the flame the barrel and pan of my fowling-piece, which I held between my legs; and took off my leather gaiters, and laid them by the fire to soften for use the next day. Genevieve cleared the table, gave the fragments to the dogs or the fowls, folded up the table-cloth, covered over the bread and replaced it carefully in the cupboard, lighted the lamp that hung from an iron hook by the side of the fireplace, from the dark stone mantel-shelf of the lofty chimney, and then sat down a little behind me to knit me some stockings of the thick white wool she had spun the season before. We used then to talk longer and more familiarly than during the rest of the day, hearing nothing but the cascade that roared without, and the fire that crackled within; we used to speak of the departed one, of his virtues, of his charity, of his poverty, of his resignation in this desert to which he had been banished, as it were to conceal his natural genius and his splendid talents from all other eyes than those of God and of the poor; we spoke of his habits, his meditations, his prayers, the mystery of his youth that had been half revealed by the pilgrimages which he made from time to time to the tomb or

the grotto; of his final illness, his last words, and his joy when he felt that God had at length consented to end his sufferings and call him to himself; then of the inconsolable grief of his parishioners, the women and the old men who came already from a distance to kneel upon his grave, as upon that of a saint; of the desolate appearance of his parsonage; of what would be the fate of the doves, the dog, the birds, the trees that he used to trim, the rivulet whose course he had directed, the flowers that he used to tend, during summer time, in the garden, and to shelter, in winter time, in his room; and even of the swallows whose nests he never disturbed in the cornices of the choir, but which would not be allowed to remain there next spring.

In these conversations, the poor woman never spoke about herself. She appeared to be much more disquieted about what would become of the dog, the birds, the furniture, and the plants, than of what would become of herself. Perhaps she thought that the new vicar would take her into his service, as he would the bell-ringer and the choristers of Jocelyn, or that one of the families in the village would engage her to weed the garden, and would give her in return her board and a lodging in the stable or cow-house. She had a little furniture of her own, consisting of a chest of drawers of walnut wood that I used to see her open sometimes, and which contained a little linen, her Sunday gown, and a little porringer of broken porcelain, full of small silver coins, pence, a chain of jet beads strung upon copper wire, two or three gold rings which had been given her by her mother, and a handsome rosary of cherry-stones, beautifully carved by a Carthusian monk, which the bishop had given her when he had spent a few days in the parsonage during his pastoral visit. These treasures were altogether worth about three or four pounds, and constituted her whole wealth. She often looked at them with evident pleasure; but since the death of Jocelyn, as she could no longer give away the good priest's money and bread in his name, she made frequent inroads into her little store, and the stock of pence rapidly diminished.

The fate of this poor woman distressed me, for I was then very poor, and I saw clearly that after the furniture had been sold to pay my friend's debts, and the expenses of his illness and burial, the inheritance would be reduced to two charges,

his dog and his birds. But Genevieve did not think of this; she, on the contrary, racked her brains to discover if the vicar did not owe a measure of barley to one person, a load of wood to another, a truss of hay for the goat to a third, and a batch of rye-bread to a fourth. She was determined not to leave a blade of grass or a grain of salt on the conscience or on the memory of her master.

But I often thought about her. From my childhood I had been accustomed to see her at the parsonage, I had never inquired how she came there, still less when she was going to leave; the vicar, the servant, and the house, were united in my mind into one single and indivisible existence, which seemed to me always to have existed thus, and to be destined always to exist in the same manner. Death had just appeared to propose to me a problem on which I had never before reflected: Whence came the servant and what will become of her?

At last I determined to speak to her on the subject, and chose my opportunity one evening after supper, when the lamp was lighted and the fire crackled pleasantly; my elbow rested on the table, and my head was leaning on my hand; Genevieve had removed the cloth, and was sitting in the shade in the angle formed by the black jambs of the chimney and the wall of the kitchen, the place in which peasants usually put the salt-box. She was busily engaged in her knitting, and as she took up the stitches, her needles knocked against each other and produced a slight metallic click. This sound, as lively, peaceful, and monotonous as that of the pendulum of the clock by the fireside, awoke me from my reverie, and emboldened me to open a serious conversation with her.

VII.

"Genevieve," said I, "you seem determined never to give yourself a moment's rest."

"Oh, sir," said she, "I was not sent into the world by God to take rest. I began to work as soon as I was able to go alone, and I shall continue to work until the day of my death. We have plenty of time for rest there," added she, pointing towards the cemetery with a movement of her head, so that

she might not lose one of the stitches of her knitting by taking away her hand.

"What!" said I, "did you begin to work so young? Then you never were a child? never played with other children? never spent your time in the street, or at the window, or by the hedge-rows? Your mother must indeed have been very harsh, or very much averse to the amusements and idleness of her children? How is it, then, that you are so kind and so playful with the children of the village, allowing them to play all day in the court, and never scolding them when they pick your flowers or meddle with your needles?"

"Ah, sir," answered she, "with them it is different, you see; they have their father and mother to get bread for them; but it was otherwise with me. Very little of my life passed pleasantly till I came here, and the vicar consented to take me into his service. Until then I did not know what it was to sit down and look at the sun, and the fire, or watch the passers-by."

"What!" said I, "was your young life so very cheerless and devoid of pleasure?"

"Oh, sir! it was not cheerless; it was painful and always busy, it is true, but at the same time it was very full of happiness, and if it were to please God to restore my mother to life, I would joyfully go through it again, very joyfully!"

"Tell me all about it then, if you please, as you have nothing else to do, and I have done reading my book, and we have a long evening before us. I should like to know the history of everybody," continued I, with a smile, "for you know, Geneviève, that if we choose, we may derive much instruction from the history of any life."

"But I am a poor servant, and have never been anything else: and what could I tell you about? I should annoy you as much with talking, as the sound of my knitting-needles annoys the children."

"If you were an ant, a cricket, or a spider, you would be interesting to me," I replied; "and I should like to know your history, from whence you came, what were your actions, your thoughts, and your wishes, and what is likely to become of you. There is a beginning, an end, and a sense to every living thing. If we knew everything, we should be indifferent about nothing."

"Yes, we should be like God," said she, lighting up her smile with a ray of pure and tender intelligence. "The vicar was right when he told us not to illtreat animals, and not to get angry with the flies and kill them: 'You have no right to despise anything and to call it of no use, for God made it,' he used to say."

"Precisely so, Genevieve," answered I, as these words recalled to my mind the gentle nature of Jocelyn; "everything is interesting, everything is respectable in the humblest destiny of the most obscure and most insignificant of all beings. Pride and folly go together, and disdain is the twin-brother of ignorance; so that I should really be greatly obliged to you if you would tell me something about yourself, where you were born, what have been your occupations, how you came here, and whither you think of going."

"I will obey you, sir," said she, with a blush, "if you wish it. But perhaps you will laugh at me!"

"Ah! Genevieve," said I, in a sorrowful tone, "did Jocelyn ever laugh at the slightest confidence bestowed on him by any one, however humble? and am I not his friend?"

"Yes, yes, it is true," said she, "I was wrong to think so poorly of you; I will tell you all."

I drew my chair nearer to the fire, she did not raise her eyes from her knitting, she did not drop a stitch, but as she worked, she went on to say:

VIII.

"I am from Voiron in Dauphiny, a pretty little town at the foot of the mountains. The water there is good for bleaching linen, the bread is sweet, and the chestnuts do not cost the poor very much. The people are gay, stirring, attentive to business, but fond of a laugh like all the rest of the inhabitants of the province; the boys and girls are almost all rosy-checked, through the winds that blow keenly over the neighbouring snows. No one would say that I came from Voiron, for I am so very pale, but that is because I never was much out in the air. I always lived in the house, and that takes away a person's colour; it is just like those plants that the vicar used to keep in the shade on the staircase.".....

"His hortensias," supplied I.

"Yes, sir, it is like the hortensias, that remain violet like moonshine on the snow and never become red like the sun, because they never see it."

"But why did you never see the sun, like the other children of Voiron?"

"I will tell you, sir," and she went on: "My father was a carpenter and glazier, and he used to take journeys in different directions to mend tables, sashes, and the windows of churches. He was not rich; he had five children, one son, twelve years of age, who used to work in the business with him, and went with him to the towns and villages in the mountains, carrying the light tools, the glass, the putty, and the knife for spreading it. Then he had four daughters; two by a first wife, who were some years older than me, myself, who was eight years of age at the time of which I am speaking, and a little sister twelve months old, who was called Josette. My mother was a wholesale bleacher, that is, she used to bleach linen for the country weavers before they took it for sale to the fairs. For this purpose we had behind the house, by the side of the river, a long strip of meadow land that was never mown, but which was always covered with pieces of moistened linen, that the sun might dry them and the dew soften their texture. It was so pretty in the middle of the day to look out of our window and see all the young girls, with naked feet, unroll the great strips of white and grey linen on the damp grass, and sprinkle over them drops of water which shone in the sunlight, glittered in their hair, and moistened their feet. Oh! I used so to long to run like them over the linen!"....

"And who was there to hinder you?" asked I.

"Ah! you shall know presently, sir; but let me go on with my story. My poor mother, though she was then only thirty-two years of age, had never left her bed since the birth of my little sister. She had no apparent malady, no cough, no fever, no head-ache; her face was as fresh, her eye as bright, and her skin as white as any young girl's, but she could not use any of her lower limbs, even to turn in her bed. People used to say that her milk had turned from some fear which she had had about bringing up Josette; others that she had got up too soon after her confinement to go and bleach her

linen, and that the dampness of the meadow had made her ill. If you had seen her sitting up in her bed in the sunshine, leaning on her pillow, and working freely with her hands all the day, in hemming, folding, and doing up the linen, or in preparing the herbs for the soup for father and the children, you would have thought that she was a young mother who would be able to get up in two days, or an idle woman who remained in bed until noon. Ah, sir! it was not that; she was never without some work in her hand, she thought about everything, she watched over everything; she even worked within her curtains by the light of a lamp that hung from the pillar of her bed, when every one else in the house was asleep; she used to try every morning to get up while all the rest were still asleep, always in the hope to find that her strength had been restored to her limbs during the night; and then, when she found that she was no better, she would cry a little, but she soon recovered herself and put on a smiling countenance, so that she might not sadden my father and my brother as they went out to work.

"My two elder sisters used also to go out to attend to the bleaching in the morning, and afterwards to a factory. We used to see them only at noon at dinner, and in the evening at supper. They used to dress like ladies; they were very fond of my mother, who had taken as much care of them as of her own three children; but they had some property from their mother's side, and they used to despise us a little, because we were young, and our mother had had nothing but her beauty, her goodness, and her ten fingers. I used to hear them say sometimes, on Sunday mornings, in the room where they were dressing to go to church, 'I don't like the look of this neckerchief; this dress is too much worn; let us give them to the little one—they are quite good enough for her.' However, they were not at all unkind, only rather proud for the daughters of a glazier.

IX.

"My father was too poor to let my mother have a servant, and I was not big enough to take care of the house altogether by myself. Our neighbours, whenever I asked them, used very kindly to come and draw up the bucket from the well

for us, put the great logs on the fire, or hang the saucepan on the chimney-hook; but my mother and I did all the rest; and as soon as I could run alone about the room, I was the born servant of the house, my mother's feet, as she, poor thing! was unable to use her own. Being continually in need of something that she could not go and fetch from the garden, from the court-yard, from the bed-room, from the fire, from the sink, from the table, or from the cupboard, she had got accustomed to make use of me, while very young; as she would have made use of a second pair of hands; and as for me, I was proud, though very little, to feel that I was as necessary, useful, and serviceable in the house as a grown-up person. This had made me attentive, sedate, serious, and reasonable before I was eight years old. My mother used to say, 'Genevieve, I want this, or I want that; bring me Josette on to the bed that I may feed her; carry her back to the cradle, and rock it with your foot until she goes to sleep; go and fetch me my stockings; pick up my ball of cotton; go and cut a salad in the garden; go to the poultry-yard, and see if the hens have laid any more eggs; chop up the cabbage, and put it into the soup for your father; beat the butter; put some wood on the fire; skim the soup that is in the saucepan; put in some salt; spread the table-cloth; wash the glasses; go down into the cellar, and fill the bottle of wine from the barrel.' And then, when I had done, and dinner was over, and all had been cleared away properly, she used to say, 'Bring me your frock, that I may dress you; and the brush and comb, that I may do your pretty hair.' She then would dress me, do my hair nicely, kiss me, and say, 'Go and amuse yourself now at the door with the neighbours' children, that they may see that you are as well-dressed, as clean, and as neat as themselves.' And I used to go and play for a few minutes to please her, but I never went further than the gate of the court-yard, that I might hear if my mother called me; and I never staid there long, because the children used to laugh at me, and say to one another, 'Oh! here's Miss Serious; she doesn't know how to play at anything; never mind her.' I preferred to go in-doors again, and stand by my mother's bedside, to watch if she wanted anything that I could get for her. The days passed on in this way. I was the first to get up in the morning the first

to go to bed at night. I only inhaled the air through the window; I only saw the sun from the threshold of the door; and this, sir, is why I had a pale face. People used to say to my mother, 'Your little girl has a very pale complexion, has she not?' 'Oh, no!' my mother would answer, 'but she has a very pale life.' I did not even go to school.

X.

"This protracted infirmity of my mother, by keeping her for so many years confined to her bed, had made her as learned as a lady, and as devout as a saint. The sons of our neighbours, who used to go to the academy in the neighbouring town, when they returned home for the holidays, used kindly to lend their books to the poor bedridden woman. And so, of an evening, when the lamp was lighted, and my father, my brother, and my two eldest sisters had come in from their work, she would gather us all together around her bed, and read to us aloud the beautiful stories that she had read to herself during the day, and that were calculated to instruct my little brother, to amuse my sisters, and to console my father. Sometimes she would read to us chapters from the Bible, in which we were told of poor people who worked hard to gain an honest livelihood, like ourselves, and who nevertheless were loved and visited by the Lord; or parables from the Gospels, with reflections by learned men to explain their beauty and meaning to the ignorant, or stories of the infant Jesus astonishing his mother, in presence of the doctors, by his knowledge, and then humbly following her home, and handling the tools and wood in his father's carpenter's shop; and then his friendly conversations with the gardeners and poor women in the suburbs of Jerusalem. At other times, she would read books written in such beautiful language, that they seemed to present thoughts and facts like pictures to our view, and to sound in our ears as melodiously as music. These books related the story of a son, called Telemachus, who went from isle to isle seeking his father, and who was continually hindered in his search by shipwrecks, adventures, temptations, and misfortunes, which, although we were pleased to hear about them, often made us weep; or else the history of a poor unfortunate, called Robin-

son, who was cast by a storm upon a desert island, in the midst of the sea, alone with a dog and a bird, and who found in his mind, and in the grace of God, means to build himself a house, to construct a garden, to gather together flocks and herds, and to bless God in his solitude. These stories used to amuse us, whilst my father was sharpening his planes on an oil-stone, and my brother was cutting glass, as easily as we could cut linen, with his sharp-pointed diamond. When the *Angelus* sounded from the church-tower, the book was shut, and we went to bed, to get up again early the next morning, and we always regretted that we had not had time to finish the story.

"This was how we passed the winter evenings. But in the day-time, when all the others had gone out, and the rooms and staircase had been properly swept, and the saucepan was boiling nicely over the hot fire, my mother used to read to me more serious and holy passages from books that she especially delighted in, because they spoke of nothing but God, or were addressed to none but God. These were the *Imitation of Jesus Christ*; *Meditations* about sickness, affliction, death, and heaven; and books of prayers, the pages of which were moistened with her tears, and worn with continual use. It was from these works that she taught me to read and to pray. Though I was very little, I liked these books better than the others, because my mother's countenance assumed a more resigned and happy expression when I gave them into her hand, and because when I saw she was sad and weeping over her forlorn condition, one of these books never failed to dry her tears and restore the smile to her face. I always fancied that God was there, that he heard our prayers, and that when I raised up my head from the coverlid on which I had been resting, I should see my mother, solaced and healed, ask for her gown, and walk about the house as easily as I could. But the will of God was not the same as my childish will. My mother continued to languish, and I grew up.

"She used to pray, however, with the fervour of an angel. It gave her great joy to see my lips move in prayer with her. She would say to me sometimes, 'Genevieve, God loves children, because they have not yet sinned. I cannot go to the church; I am sure that if I could, I should return again.

in health; go thither for me; get up very early to-morrow morning, and go and hear, in my stead, the first mass that our good vicar says, before daybreak, for those poor people who cannot afford to spend half an hour in the course of the day before the altar; you must take my rosary, and tell over my beads for me. Perhaps our merciful God will accept the presence and the prayer of the child instead of the presence and prayer of the mother. Go, then, my daughter.'

"And I always went, sir. I got up without making any noise, carrying my wooden shoes in my hand; so that nobody might hear me as I went down the staircase; and I went into the church whilst it was still night. The servants and old women used to whisper to one another, 'Look at that little girl! She is the daughter of the glazier's bedridden wife, and she has come in place of her mother, poor thing! She has early learned what misery is, and she has much need of the grace of God!' I never stopped to listen to them; I walked to the place which my mother had pointed out to me, near a pillar at the corner of the railing of the choir, where there was a chapel which was called the chapel of cures. I heard mass said in the cold and sombre church, which was lighted only by the two small wax tapers on the altar; I told over my mother's beads seven or eight times, always hoping that the last would be the fortunate one. I wept over them with child-like impatience and ardour. Then I took up my wooden shoes, and ran home again as fast as I could. 'Thank you, Genevieve,' my mother would say, as I came in, 'I am not cared, but I feel better. Our time is not God's time, you see; but all the hours that we spend in praying sincerely to him will not be without avail. Let us wait his good pleasure patiently. We are indebted to him for our life, and he can dispose of it as he may choose. Perhaps he has in reserve for me a day of happiness that will counterbalance a thousand days of suffering, although he has refused to grant me my desire to-day.' And then we both resumed our daily avocations in a more contented mind. It was this, I think, sir, that has inspired me through my whole lifetime with a great affection for churches, and a strong desire to serve the ministers of God; and which led me to make my vow, as I shall tell you presently. But am I not wearying you, sir? Tell me candidly, and I will soon bring my story to an end."

"No, no;" replied I, "nothing wearies me when it proceeds with truth and simplicity from the heart. Tell me all, as it occurs to your memory. Details, my poor Genevieve, are only the pieces of which God makes up the whole. What would your life be if you took no account of the days?"

"Ah! that is true, sir," she replied, "the vicar used to say rightly; 'A million of blades of grass make a meadow; millions upon millions of grains of dust constitute a mountain. The ocean consists of drops of water; our life is made up of minutes.' I will try and recollect every circumstance of interest that happened in those times."

And she spent a moment in reflection, laying down her needles, and shutting her eyes. Then she opened them again, and resumed at once her knitting and the conversation; but her countenance had all at once assumed a graver and more melancholy expression. I could see that she was about to open some tender and perhaps bleeding corner of her memory.

XI.

"We lived thus, sir, for about ten years, without any great change occurring in my father's house. My two half-sisters had got married to respectable young men employed in the neighbouring factory. They had taken with them all the property and furniture that belonged to them on their mother's side. They scarcely ever came to see us; they were ashamed of our poverty; they despised us. My brother had attained the age for military service. He was my father's only workman—a good and faithful assistant, who did the work of two, was never troublesome, and required no wages. We had scraped together all that we could, and sold our golden chains and crosses, in order to obtain a substitute for him, if he were drawn for the army. We had had many masses said for him at Voiron and at the chapel of the Grande Chartreuse, in the hope that he would draw a good number, and that our only support might not be taken from us. But he was unsuccessful. God designed to afflict us; he is our master, and he knows what is best for us. In that year, substitutes cost sixteen hundred francs; we could not succeed in getting more than fourteen hundred, and for want of these two hundred francs the poor boy had to go. This was the

cause of great desolation in the house; my father lost courage; my mother grew thin and pale with sorrow; my poor little sister Josette, who was then eleven years and a half old, was her only consolation, but she was also her chief anxiety.

"This little girl, sir, whom my mother had spoiled rather more than the rest of us, as mothers always spoil their last child, well deserved her preference. She was as beautiful as an angel, as lively as a bird, as gay and capricious as a kid. She was by far the prettiest child in all Voiron. My mother and I used to take pleasure in dressing her like a young lady with the little finery that we had, giving her an elegant head-dress, a nice frock, lace, buckled shoes, and white stockings. When I took her, dressed in this way, on Sundays, to church, the ladies would stop and say: 'Look there; what a fine child! Who would think she was the daughter of the poor glazier's bedridden wife?' The little one heard all these sayings, and was not a little proud to repeat them to her mother on her return home. She liked to go out nicely dressed to be admired in this way; and it was natural that she should. She was like a little peacock admiring his beautiful feathers as they glittered in the sunlight; but she had such a kind heart—such a good heart, that she did not despise us; on the contrary, she used to kiss my mother and myself for hours together; and she used to say that she was very, very happy, because the other little girls who lived near us had only one mother while she had two! Oh, I loved her dearly! I loved her so much, sir; she was like a daughter to me; she had slept with me ever since she had been weaned. I was as bad as my father,—I let her do what she pleased."

Here Genevieve became visibly affected, her voice trembled, and her eyes were suffused with tears. As for myself, I sighed involuntarily, for I foresaw that some misfortune was about to happen.

XII.

"Alas, sir!" continued Genevieve, "our poor mother had good reason to feel anxiety for Josette, for she felt her strength failing day by day. Her malady was not painful, but care was killing her; and then she saw my father growing old, and misery approaching, as my brother earned only his

pay as a soldier. Sometimes she would call me during the night, while my father and sister were asleep, under the pretext of asking me for something to drink, or to light the lamp, or to replace her pillow beneath her head, or to read her a prayer from her Book of Hours. But I soon saw that this was not her real reason; it was that she might talk with me, and not have to weep alone, sir. She would say to me, 'Forgive me, my poor Genevieve, for disturbing your sleep; misery gives you very little time for repose; but to you alone can I open my heart, which sometimes seems ready to burst as I lie awake of a night. Is it not now nearly day?' And then she spoke to me like a person in a fever, her eyes sparkled, her cheeks were red, her lips parched, and her words hurried; she spoke of my brother, of her regret that she should die before he had got his dismissal, and could come and work for our support; of my father, who was becoming less active and skilful at his business, who was losing his eyesight, spoiling and breaking his glass, and losing his country business; but especially of the little one, who occupied more than half her thoughts. I attempted to console her by telling her that I was young and strong, although I did not look so; that I was accustomed to work, that I would go to service, or get employment from the bleachers of linen; that perhaps I might marry some honest lad, and that we would take Josette home with us, and take as much care of her as of one of our own children. 'Oh! yes, Genevieve,' she would say, 'promise me faithfully, swear to me upon the cross of your rosary, that you will be a mother to her, and that you will make for her all the sacrifices that a mother would make for her child!' And I felt no difficulty in swearing to do this, sir, for I did not lie; she was my idol, she was my heart. This little girl, you see, was the idol of us both.

"Then my mother embraced me, and I went in a more contented frame of mind to lie down again by my sister's side, who never for a moment imagined that we had just been speaking of her, and weeping together.

XIII.

"When the autumn was come, and the leaves were fading, and the first snow was beginning to fall on the linen as it lay

bleaching in the meadows, my mother called to me one night in a voice that I did not recognize, and that made me shudder all over. I ran immediately to her bedside. 'Genevieve,' said she, 'as soon as day breaks, go and fetch the vicar; remove your father and Josette out of the way on any pretence you can think of, for I do not wish them to witness my death agony. I feel there,' added she, taking my hand, and pressing it upon her heart, 'that I am going to die during the day! Do not cry, do not weep, my child, or you will wake them; draw my curtains close, and tell them when they get up, that I am going to sleep.'

"I went out into the court-yard to sob against the wall, so that no one might hear me. Then I did as my mother had bidden me. I took Josette to the house of a neighbour, who was teaching her to make lace upon a cushion; I told my father that his customers in the mountains had been inquiring for him, because the late hail storm had broken a great many windows; so he took his pack of glass on to his back, and trudged off. The vicar came, my mother confessed and took the eucharist; she suffered no agony, her life had been wasting away for years, and she died peacefully with me only in the room. Her last words recommended Josette to my care: 'I should have very much liked to have seen her,' said she, 'but you must embrace her for me.' Then I laid the crucifix upon her lips; and while kissing it, she kissed my fingers. When I could no longer feel her breath upon my hands, I fell on the ground at the foot of the bed: she was dead! I watched, and laid out her corpse alone in the house by myself.

XIV.

"The neighbours kept Josette and my father away until after the burial. I set all in order in the house, just as we are doing now. Then they returned. Oh! how sad it was to see that bed of green serge still standing there, with the curtains closed, and no longer to hear that sweet voice say continually, 'Genevieve!' It was very foolish of me, sir, I dare say; but many times during the first few months after her death, when I was alone in the room, I used to go and open the curtains, and say in a low voice: 'Here I am, mother, what do you wish?'"

Poor Genevieve, at these words, could contain herself no longer, and she burst into tears; but soon, by a strong effort, she resumed her composure, and went on with her story. I was so much affected, that I could not help weeping with her.

XV.

"My father," resumed Genevieve, "could not endure this desolation. My mother had been his conscience, his intellect, and his will. When she ceased to exist, he was a mere body without a soul. He never returned now of an evening to watch beside that empty bed. He went out after his work to seek relief elsewhere. He fell into bad company; he was led, poor man, into coffee-houses and wine-shops; he became fond of gaming, gave himself up to drink, and came home late at night; he no longer worked with spirit at his trade, he consumed or lost the fourteen hundred francs that we had saved up during so many years for the purpose of buying the discharge of my brother, or giving a dowry, some time or other, to Josette and myself. In a very short time he became an habitual brandy-drinker; and when I ventured respectfully to represent to him the folly of the course he was pursuing, 'Pshaw!' he would say, 'you are right, but I can't help it. Now that I no longer have your brother with me in the workshop, and your mother in the house, both are distasteful to me. I am only happy when I am unconscious; the glass is my only pleasure. Let me then follow my own course, it will not be for long; the barrel will soon be empty, and so much the better, for life is a burden to me!' Sometimes, however, he would kiss my sister and myself before he went out, and say: 'Be good girls; I am going to pray to-day at the cemetery, by your mother's tomb, I shall soon come back, and to-morrow I shall work hard.' And then he went out, and frequently did not return for three or four days. Once, eight days passed without our hearing anything of him. At last we learned that he had been found dead under the snow, in the ravine of Saint Laurent, leading to the convent. It was uncertain whether he had fallen asleep on the road after leaving the inn at Saint Laurent, or whether he had been overtaken by the night, and buried beneath an avalanche. Thus, Josette and I were left alone; and the neighbours used laughingly to call us the mother and daughter.

XVI.

"My mother had not taught me any business, and so I had to seek some means of obtaining a subsistence for Josette and myself: I took a small mercer's shop, and kept my sister with me to serve behind the counter, while she learned to make black lace for the peasant women of Upper Dauphiny and the Valais. I obtained, on credit, a small stock of goods, which I sold to the pedlars from the mountains, such as bone buttons, shoe-buckles, and garters, gaiters of thick white wool that would reach above the knees, like those that are worn here, paper, ink, pens, wooden shoes, and some pieces of thick stuff, red, white, and blue, of which the mountaineers' wives made their gowns. As I was attentive, and my sister was pretty, we soon had a good many customers. The villagers about, who had formerly known my father, always came to buy their stock of things for the winter season at our shop. But when once the winter had come, we sold scarcely anything. We found it hard to live, but to gain a little something, I used to do the household work of those of my neighbours who were away from home, or ill, or in confinement; and they used to give me in return my food, and some three or four pence a day. They liked to have me to attend upon them, because around my mother's sick bed I had learned so well how to amuse an invalid, and how to arrange her pillows comfortably. Several times during the day I used to run home to see how Josette was getting on alone in the house, and to prepare her meals for her; and when I had seen her safe to bed, I used to return to watch all night with my patients, sitting up in a chair.

XVII.

"This lasted for two years, and everything went on prosperously with us, but I began to feel sad without knowing why. It was because I was then twenty years old, and I used to see all the girls of my own age courted by the lads of the country, then betrothed, then married to the one whom they had preferred above all others. I was often desired to go to a house to dress the bride and to prepare the marriage feast. Whilst the other young girls of my age went to the

church, chatted at the table with their acquaintances, or danced at the farms, I adjusted their dresses, or baked the cakes, or spread the table-cloth alone with the old women in the house. It made me reflect, sometimes, when I saw the happiness that was expressed on the countenances of those pretty girls, flushed with dancing, who went to whisper with their sweethearts by the well in the courtyard, or behind the flowering bushes in the garden. I used to say to myself: 'They will have many troubles in the course of their lives, it is true; but then they will not be alone in the house, alone at their work, alone in their youth, alone in their old age, as I shall be, when I have brought up Josette and seen her married; they will have around them children as pretty as my little sister, who will play before their doors, who will warm their little hands before the fire in the winter-time, who will hang to their gowns, and who will call them to their bedside morning and evening to kiss and embrace them! But as for me, I shall have nothing when Josette is gone, but the four walls of my room, and the noise of the logs crackling on the hearth in winter-time, and the buzzing of the flies against the glass in the summer!' These thoughts would sometimes make me draw a long breath; and little Josette, who saw me reflecting, and heard me sigh, would say: 'What's the matter, then, Genevieve? Have I done anything to grieve you?' 'No,' I would say to her, with a kiss, 'no, my pet; on the contrary, you only cause me pleasure; I love you too much; but I sometimes think how lonely I shall be when I have not you with me!' 'And why shall I not be with you?' she would answer; 'it there a time coming when you will not love me?' 'Oh! no,' I answered, 'but there is a time coming when you will love others besides me.' She did not understand me, poor innocent, and we used to go on with our work, she looking playfully out of the window, whilst I fixed my eyes upon my needle and thread, and strove to repress my tears.

XVIII.

"These fits of sadness always became more frequent and of longer continuance towards the end of the autumn, sir, when the young pedlars from the mountains, who came to buy their winter stock of needles, pins, sheaths, and thimbles at our

shop, returned to their villages to remain there until the spring. You will ask me why this was so? I did not at first know why myself. To my misfortune I found out afterwards. I will tell you frankly all about it." . . .

She made a short pause, but soon, with a sigh, she resumed:

XIX.

"Now, sir, I am going to speak to you as I would to my confessor. There is no harm in doing so; but there is always pain inflicted by touching the heart in a place where it has bled. Excuse me; but if I did not tell you this, you would not understand the rest, nor why I remained an old maid and became the vicar's servant.

"Well, sir," continued Genevieve, with an evident effort, "it was because there was a young mountaineer whom I loved."

"And who loved you," said I, with a smile, "for though you now look very sober and unimpassioned, and are dressed all in black, yet I can easily see from your face that you had your month of May once, and were a blooming and pretty girl."

"Well, sir, yes, my looks pleased him. Since my mother's death, I had had less anxiety, I had not been obliged to get out of bed some'twenty times during the night, I could see the sun, I walked about in the open air, and so I had become like other people, and gained some colour. I had grown fatter too, and some of the sun's rays had penetrated into the formerly impenetrable shade of my eyes. This did not last long, I know, but for two or three years I was not ugly. The lads of Voiron used to stop and look at me through the front window on a Sunday, and I heard them say to one another: 'There, look at Genevieve! You might say that she is blooming like the carnations on her window-sill, and that she is at last venturing to be pretty.' What shall I say, sir? The summer sun shines upon every plant, even upon the Alps where the summer is so transitory. These are the sunbeams that gild the pale ears of barley in harvest-time. I was like these barley-straws, and like them, I had my short gleam of beauty. But it only shone for two or three seasons over my face, and I do not regret it;" she added, quickly, "oh! no, I do not regret it; I have suffered too much."

XX.

"There was then, sir, a young mountaineer from this very village, the son of the country schoolmaster and of that old woman who lives in the valley, in the hamlet of the Trois Melèzes, and whom you have seen sometimes come and chat with me at the door of the church. His name was Cyprien; he was to succeed his father as schoolmaster, to teach the children to write and read, and meanwhile he was a chorister and clerk at the church, and on week-days he used to travel through the mountains to sell almanacks, thread, needles, looking-glasses, and prayer-books to the villagers. My father had known him when he was a very little fellow, having seen him when he had gone to mend the sashes and windows of the church at Valneige. He always came to our shop to purchase his little stock-in-trade, and when he came down from the mountains, he always called at our house as if we had been his relations. My eldest sisters used to laugh at him because he was a simple mountaineer, and did not dress in the same way as the young men of Voiron. But my mother was very fond of him, because he was as quiet and modest as a young girl, blushing whenever he was spoken to, and because, instead of running off to fêtes or spending his time at inns with the others, he liked to stay all the evening to hear my mother read some of her beautiful and interesting stories, or to help me draw the water from the well, or knead the bread, or put the great saucepans on the fire. I was accustomed to look upon him as a sort of elder brother. He was two years older than me, tall, agile, rather slender, like the fir trees on these barren mountains; his eyes were darker than mine, but as gentle as the eyes of a woman; his face was longer and more delicate than the faces of the inhabitants of the plain, his mouth was a serious one, his complexion as beautiful in colour as pink velvet, and his long black hair fell gracefully down upon his shoulders. He used to wear a long jacket of thick white cloth, that reached down to his leathern garters, wide trousers well furnished with pockets, and long gaiters that buttoned above the knees. The nails of his thick-soled shoes used to shine like diamonds in the fire-light, and when he walked about the room, they clattered finely upon the flag-stones; he used to put his stick and his

knapsack behind the door, just as if he had been at home. His voice was sweet and strong, and rather drawling, like an organ in the church at Grenoble.

"As I grew bigger, he used to come more frequently to our house; I did not know why, nor he either, poor fellow. He never did more than call me by my name, and I never did more than call him by his; only I was pleased to see his shadow on the wall of the room by the light of the wood fire, when I stirred it up to prepare supper for the family. On those days there was always something more than usual on the table, such as wheaten bread, or pancakes; and when, on the following day, I missed his stick and bundle from behind the door, I used to feel sorry without knowing why—that was all.

XXI.

"The death of my father and mother had not interrupted these visits of Cyprien to Voiron, or broken off his connexion with me. On the contrary, he used to come more frequently, and stay for a rather longer time, only he did not lodge any more in the house, he used to go and ask shelter for the night of one of his countrymen, who used, in winter-time, to go out cutting wood for the rich families of the town, and who kept at his house little boys from the mountains to sweep the chimneys. But during the two or three days that Cyprien spent on each visit at his countryman's house, he was continually passing and repassing the whole of the day in front of ours, and he continually found some fresh reason for coming in and staying for a few minutes. Sometimes he had forgotten to buy his stock of sleeve-buttons, sometimes his pins, sometimes his reels of thread; at other times he had a message to deliver to me from his father or mother, who had requested him to remind me to order some ornaments for the church, or to send to Grenoble for some almanacks for the next Christmas; and at other times he was very tired with having walked so much about Voiron to buy his flax or his tow, and he asked leave to sit down for a moment by the counter, whilst I was talking or weighing out pennyworths of salt, or of ginger-bread for the little children of my customers. This moment used to last for hours, though neither of us were conscious how quickly the time was passing. The neighbours who saw

him with his elbow resting on the counter when they passed, his black hair shining in the sun-light like the wings of a raven, his stick fixed between his legs, and his bundle on his knees, used to say: 'There is a handsome mountaineer who is trying to be sociable with the girls of the plain. Look at him; you would say he was always going to speak, and yet he does nothing but look at the toe of his shoe.'

"The fact was, sir, that he said scarcely anything to me, and I said as little to him; or else he spoke to me of things that were very far removed from his and my real thoughts; for example, of the weather, of the time, of those of his mother's cows that had had calves, of his father's mule which had strayed into the pine forest, of the cheese which had not thickened well in the dairies that year, of the barley which had sprung up too soon, and had been nipped in the bud by the late frosts; indeed, of everything except of himself and of myself. And I used to do just the same, sir; I either said nothing, or I answered yes and no, or I talked to him of things that were devoid of interest to both of us. But it was all the same; he followed my hand with his eyes, which went from my knees to my forehead, as I sat hemming a pocket-handkerchief; and I used to look with admiration at his handsome face and splendid black hair. He appeared to be happy, and I myself felt so joyful that I could have passed years in that silence, or in those insignificant conversations. When he rose to return to the mountains, passed his arms through the leathern straps of his knapsack, and drew pensive zig-zags upon the floor with the iron point of his stick, we used simply to say to one another: 'Good bye, we shall meet again next spring.' He used to turn back three or four times before he went out of the street; I followed him with my eyes as a sister follows the departing figure of a brother, and returned into the house alone. Only I then had a more oppressive sense of my loneliness, and until my little sister came home from the house of her mistress, where she was learning to make lace, I did nothing but move restlessly about; I could not sit quietly on my chair, I could not rest, but why I did not know.

"I did not think that he loved me; I did not even think that I myself loved him; only I began to feel a little vanity; I took more pains to dress myself becomingly, and I did my

hair carefully before a little mirror, which till then I had scarcely ever used; I wore white stockings and neat shoes. On Sundays, I took pleasure in looking at myself in the plate-glass windows of the shops, which were the only mirrors wherein poor girls like myself could behold themselves from top to toe, and admire their figure, their gait, and their toilette on holidays. Ah! sir, we have all been sinners, more or less, in our younger days. But I made confession of these faults long since. Nevertheless, I had no desire to please any one; but I was like my poor dead master's canary, who plumes his feathers, washes himself in the water, caresses his neck with his beak, and looks at himself in the glass, although he is alone in the cage. How can we expect it to be otherwise; the consequences of the fall have extended over the whole creation; even the beasts are vain. Alas! yes, sir, I was very vain in those days.

XXII.

"The period was approaching when I was accustomed to see Cyprien at Voiron. I had made myself a handsome dress; I had bought myself a chain of jet beads with a golden cross, which I still possess," said she, pointing to her chest of drawers. "I did not know why I was more than usually anxious to look nice. I wore my new things every day for fear lest, by chance, Cyprien might come on a day when I was less handsomely dressed, and that thus I should find less favour in his eyes. My little sister said to me: 'Sister, every day seems to be Sunday with you this week.' I did not know what answer to give her, and I could only blush in confusion.

XXIII.

"The whole week passed; those seven days appeared to me longer than the preceding months. Saturday arrived, night came, and still he did not come. The next day was Holy Easter Sunday. He had never before let this week pass without coming to Voiron to buy church tapers, paper flowers for the altar, and spring neckerchiefs for the season. I did not know what could have happened. I saw some of his countrymen, whom I knew by sight, in the town. I stopped them under one pretext or another, and asked of them: 'Is

Cyprien ill?' 'No,' they answered me, 'we saw him last Sunday mending the wall round the fountain in the meadow.' 'Is he not coming to Voiron this year?' 'We do not know,' they answered. I went home very sorrowful. I could not sleep all night, except for a moment just before daybreak, and when I woke, I found that my pillow was quite wet, and that I had been crying in my dreams, without knowing why.

XXIV.

"I came back from mass quite pale and down-hearted. Josette was playing in the street with some other children, I had just returned my prayer-book to its place in the drawer, and I was resting my heavy head on my hands and leaning on the counter, thinking of nothing. A mountaineer, whom I did not know by sight, came into my shop and asked to see some small mirrors. I showed some to him politely; he bought two of them, paid for them, and went out of the shop. While counting the money before putting it into the drawer, I found he had given me sixpence too much; I took the money in my hand and ran after him. 'Father,' said I, 'you have made a mistake, you only bought two mirrors and you have paid for three; here is your sixpence, take it back, or else buy another mirror.' He looked at me from head to foot with a little laugh that I did not understand, and that made me feel ashamed, because I thought he was laughing at me. 'Well, miss,' said he, 'never mind about that: by my faith, you are a pretty girl, and as honest as handsome; my son told me the truth, you would not cheat a sucking child: I am very glad to find it is so.' 'Your son!' said I, blushing crimson, for I now began to suspect who it was, 'who is your son? I do not know him.' 'Oh, yes! you know him,' replied he, 'and he knows you very well! You don't mean to say that you don't know Cyprien, the handsome mountaineer, and the good mountaineer, though I say so that shouldn't: well! he is my son.' 'Ah! you are Cyprien's father,' replied I, trembling, with downcast eyes. And I could not say any more, so trembling, and cold, and motionless did I feel myself in the presence of that old man. And yet he was a very good-looking old man, sir, for his time of life; his face was grave, his voice sweet, his cap in

his hand, his hair white, his appearance respectable, and his language becoming his age, speaking to me as he would have spoken to his daughter or to a lady. 'Yes, I am his father,' continued he, leading me back to the house, 'an old friend of your father's, an old and faithful customer of your house; he never lodged elsewhere than in my house, when he came up in the summer to work among the mountains; we used to talk together of his poor sick wife and of his three children. The good man! he took his grief too much to heart: he tried to drown it in the glass, and drowned himself instead; but that doesn't prevent his being a worthy man, and one whose name his children need never be ashamed to bear.'

"So saying, he followed me into the shop, and sat down upon the chair on which Cyprien had sat so often, quite close to me.

"Well, miss!" said he, when he had seen me sit down blushing and trembling behind the counter, 'so you think that at my age I cannot count up to thirty-six, and that I give away my pence out of reverence to a young girl? Nothing of the kind,' continued he, in a kind and affable tone, 'but my son was continually saying to me: "There isn't an honest girl in Voiron, she would not cheat one of her customers, not even an unknown passenger." "Pooh! pooh!" I used to say to him, "Cyprien, you don't know the world; I wouldn't trust her, for all you may say." "Well! go and try her," he said to me. "I will say nothing to her about it, I will send her no hint of your intentions, and if she cheats you—why, I will never stop again before her door. I will have nothing more to do with her, for, though she is very pretty, if she were not honest, I should cease to love her, you may be sure."

"He loves me then," said I to myself, in a low voice, without daring to raise my eyes. The old man went on:

"Then I said: "Let us go and see for ourselves." I put on my gaiters; left Cyprien to sing in the choir in my stead; asked for Genevieve's shop; came in, and haggled about the price so that I might have time to look at you; I pretended to make a mistake of sixpence in the payment, you ran after me, as if I had been the robber and you the victim, to restore my sixpence, and—here we are.'

"I only did my duty, father Cyprien," said I to him, 'I did nothing to be proud of.'

“‘That is true,’ said he; ‘but it is not less true that if you will listen to me, that sixpence will have bought me a daughter-in-law, and you, Genevieve, the best husband in the province.’

“I was so much startled, sir, by the words of this old man, that I could not open my mouth, and hardly dared to move a limb. He himself seemed to be rather embarrassed at what he had just said. He stuttered a little, got up from his chair, sat down again, and coughed. At length, as if he had again gathered up his courage, he said:

“‘Pshaw! one word spoken is worth a hundred words unspoken. I may as well tell you all: Cyprien has loved you for the last seven years.’

“He seemed to take a great load off my heart by these words, and to open the springs of a fountain of sweetness which, like eternal happiness, would never exhaust its flow.

“‘Yes! he has loved you for seven years, and we never could induce him to love another, either in the mountains or in the plain. He will have some property; the fir-wood, the house, and the meadow by the fountain will become his after my death; he is as sweet-tempered and humble as a young girl; he is beloved by the young men, the maidens are fond of him, and yet he is not more proud than a little child. He has always told us: “I will never marry any one but Genevieve, if I could only venture to court her.” “Well!” his mother and I used to say to him, “please yourself, go down into the plain, pay court to Genevieve, since your happiness depends upon her; but you must make haste and get married, as there is plenty of work to do, and we are getting old.” Then he would set out resolved to come to an explanation with you, miss, and yet when he returned and we asked him, “What did you say to her and what answer did she give you?” “Nothing,” he replied, “I never dared to speak to her about it; she is a girl of the plain, and I am a mountain lad; she is a young lady from the town, and I am a peasant from the village. I was afraid of being despised; and then, if she had told me ‘No,’ I should have fallen down dead with grief upon the road. I did not speak to her, but next season I shall be bolder; trust me for that.” The next season passed in the same way, and the poor lad grew more and more dispirited, and we saw him wasting away from the summer to the

autump. At last I said to him, "Shall I go and talk to her? Your mother is lame, so she could never go down there and come up the hills again. I am old, but I am strong: I will think of something or other to buy at her shop, I will practise a mountaineer's cunning to get into conversation with her, I will inquire about her in Voiron and find out what sort of character she has; I will see if she is prepossessing and pretty, and kind to poor people; and if she is, I will then say to her, Cyprien loves you." I have done as I promised, Miss Genevieve, you will allow; and now will you tell me frankly in your turn, Do you love our Cyprien?"

XXV.

"My only answer was a deep sigh, but he understood its meaning.

" 'Well!' said he, 'that's right; and, as you love him, will you marry him and come and live with us?'

"I could not find words to answer, but I burst into tears.

" 'Well! that's right,' said he, again, 'the betrothal shall take place on St. John's day. I will go back and rejoice my son's heart. Cyprien will now come and court you openly, until the day of your betrothal; and he will not have the embarrassment of telling you that he loves you, and of asking you if you return his affection. I have spoken in his stead, and all is settled. Good bye, Miss Genevieve, I will not even drink a glass of wine in Voiron, lest I should delay Cyprien's happiness for a moment. I am sure that I shall meet him half-way on the road, and that he is even now counting my footsteps in his mind.'

"And the old man set off, as light-hearted as if he had just succeeded in inducing a pretty girl to become his own betrothed.

XXVI.

"On the following Sunday, sir, Cyprien came to see me, as I expected he would. He seemed very happy and very much ashamed of himself, and so was I. He took my hand tremblingly as I stood behind the counter folding up a yard of serge, and squeezed it gently, looking into my face all the

while to see if I was angry. I said nothing, and I did not look displeased; and this encouraged him.

“‘You are not angry with me, then, Genevieve?’ he said.

“I simply answered, ‘No,’ in a very low voice, and without withdrawing my hand from his. Then we remained standing in this way for a long time without saying a word to one another; but my heart beat so, and so did his, against the counter, that I could hear its pulsations as plainly as the ticking of a clock.

“‘Genevieve,’ he said at last, ‘so my father spoke to you about me.’

“‘Yes,’ I answered, and said nothing more.

“‘Well, then, we shall be betrothed next month.’

“‘Next month?’ I replied.

“‘Yes truly!’ he replied, withdrawing his right hand from mine, that he might clap both together for joy.

“‘Yes truly!’ I replied with gravity, as if I had just taken an oath.

“‘Well then! let us go and take a walk in the fields,’ said he, ‘for I can stand here no longer. The soles of my feet are burning with the desire to walk out with you, Genevieve, and to say to all my countrymen whom we may meet and who will ask: “Whom is Cyprien walking with?”—“She is my intended.”’

“And we went out for a walk together, and strolled about the whole evening for a long way, in the fields by the river-side. Josette was with us, but she could not make it out; so she played about, before and behind us, with the outterflies on the grass and the little fishes in the water. We hardly said a word to one another; but we held each other by the hand, all the while, just like children going to school. This pleased both him and me, and we sighed so loud, that my little sister said to me every now and then, in a low voice: ‘You are sorrowful about something, Genevieve. Why does that naughty M. Cyprien come to make you sigh?’

“This made Cyprien laugh, when I told him about it when the little one was at a distance, and I put up the corner of my apron to my eyes, as if I had been crying; but it was to smile, and to look smilingly at Cyprien who was squeezing my hand. Then Josette pulled down my apron from before my eyes and said: ‘Oh! you’re laughing; it’s only fun.’

XXVII.

"We did not return to the house until very late, and everything had been settled between us. Cyprien was to return home the same night, and to continue his haymaking for a fortnight; he was to come and fetch me from Voiron that the betrothal might take place in the village and in his father's house, because his lame mother was not able to come down into the plain. He was to bring me back the same day to Voiron, and we were to be married after the barley harvest was over, during the week before Assumption-day.

"He left me as happy as if we had been already united. He trusted my word, poor fellow, as implicitly as if it had been Gospel. Ah! sir, what a traitor I was!" said she, striking her knitting needles against her breast as though she would have plunged them into her flesh; "but it was for a good motive, nevertheless," added she, with an accent of conviction that seemed almost to condole her.

"How! Genevieve," said I with astonishment, "you turned traitor? is it possible?"

"Ah! sir, when I say traitor, I should say thoughtless; but very unfortunately thoughtless, as you will see. But before I begin to tell you all about that, I must throw some pine-logs on the fire, or it will go out, and I must look into the saucepan to see that the potatoes which I promised to take early in the morning to poor Margaret's children are cooking properly."

She threw the logs on the fire, took off the lid of the saucepan, poured in some more water to prevent the potatoes from getting burnt, and then sat down again by the lamp. I took advantage of this break in her narration to unfasten the collar of my dog, who made a noise with his bells as he ran after the flies, and to drop a little oil into the lock of my gun. Genevieve continued her story thus:

XXVIII.

"The story of the sixpence, which Cyprien's father had related at all the public-houses on his return home, to gain credit for his adroitness, and the walk that I had taken in

the fields on the following Sunday with his son, had made some noise in Voiron. The neighbours and the young girls of my acquaintance pretended to laugh at me for being about to marry a young man from the mountains, who wore leather gaiters and long hair ; but in reality they were all jealous of my good fortune, for I heard that they said among themselves : ' Well ! if the handsome mountaineer was determined to marry a girl from the plain, he might have found many prettier and richer than Genevieve.' The wiser women complimented me, and said : ' You have done well, Genevieve ; the style of dress is no matter, you are marrying into a good family ; Providence owed you this good turn for all the sufferings you underwent on your mother's account. She will be very happy in heaven to know that you are married to so handsome, so rich, and so honest a lad.' I heard all this, and I strove to make myself look as nice as I could on the day of our betrothal, that I might do honour to Cyprien.

XXIX.

"I had scraped together a little sum out of my savings, after having paid the expense of my sister's apprenticeship to the lace-maker ; and I had put this into the salt-box, by the side of our bed. I said to myself : ' You must buy some linen for yourself, a new gown, a head-dress, a pair of kid shoes, a gold ring for Cyprien, and some boxes of sweetmeats for the relatives and neighbours.' I spent all my hoard in purchasing this trousseau, as my mother had not been able to provide one for me before her death. But for all that, I was as well fitted out as any girl whose parents were both alive. All this apparel was laid out on my drawers by the side of the bed. Twenty times during the day I went to look at it, and to say to myself : ' When you are dressed in these fine things, Genevieve, what will you look like ? ' Really, sir, I had not courage to try them on, for fear I should not know myself in them. I should have blushed to dress myself out so, even before little Josette.

"At last, however, I was obliged to put them on, for it was the morning of the day upon which Cyprien was to come and take me to be betrothed. I took Josette very

early in the morning to her mistress, and asked her to keep her for two days, and to let her sleep with her children. I told my sister to be very good, and having kissed her, I went home to dress myself.

"Scarcely had I finished buckling my shoes, and pinning my red handkerchief over my green silk dress, when I heard the footsteps of a mule stopping before my door. I heard a knock and ran to open the door. It was Cyprien in new clothes, new shoes, and a new hat, with a broad brim that fell down to his shoulders. It was not yet quite daylight, although it was three weeks after Easter. There was as yet no one either at the windows or in the street.

"Cyprien had walked over in the night, so as to fetch me by day-break, that we might arrive in the village in time for mass. The mule was standing at the door, quietly eating his morning meal from a bag that hung about his neck, and thus brought his hay close to his mouth. He had a red plume on his forehead, a collar of bells that sounded gaily at every movement of his body, a pommel of leather, ornamented with metal plates that shone like gold, a large well-padded saddle, covered with a handsome carpet of coloured wool, with a great pommel of leather, and crupper for the rider to lean against, and two steel stirrups dangling from short straps fastened to the middle of the saddle, so that a woman could put her feet into them.

"'Come, Genevieve,' said Cyprien, 'let us not lose a moment, the road is long, and the sun travels quickly when he has once left the fir-wood yonder; besides, the family are expecting us.'

"I shut the door, and gave him the keys, just as if he had already been my husband. He took me in his arms as easily as if I had been a sheaf of barley, seated me gently in the saddle, put my feet into the stirrups, and then gave the bridle into one of my hands, and told me to hold the pommel of the saddle with the other.

"'Don't be afraid, Genevieve,' he said, 'I'll walk by your side, a little in advance, that I may hold the mule by the halter, and if he makes a false step, or you feel afraid, cry out, and throw yourself towards me, I won't let you fall to the ground. Now, off we go.'

XXX.

"I was very much alarmed, but I said nothing, and I picked up my courage when I saw Cyprien's head and shoulders almost touching my knee, and sweeping off the dust from my shoes. I said to myself, 'I have nothing to fear while I am so near him.' It was not quite day yet, when we crossed the little bridge in the midst of the fields, and began to ascend the path that leads up into the mountains. Cyprien, without looking at me, or saying anything to me, began to sing as loudly as he could, and with so melodious a voice, that the rocks on our road resounded with the betrothal song, as we proceeded on our way.

"The bells, and the clattering of the hoofs of the mule upon the smooth rocks, formed an accompaniment to Cyprien's song; and as the nightingales now began to awake, and the larks to soar heavenwards, and the cascades roared along, and the young girls just risen from bed, came out to the doors of their cottages to see us pass,—everything was so gay, sir, that my heart really overflowed with joy, and I seemed to have been lifted up into the third heaven. I remembered to have seen in the Bible on my mother's bed, a picture of the Holy Virgin seated with the infant Jesus upon a mule, which an angel was leading by the bridle. I said to myself, 'You are like a Holy Virgin, but what have you done with the child?' And for a moment my heart was saddened when I thought that I had left Josette behind: but this feeling did not last long. Cyprien turned round another rock, entered into another wood, forded another mountain torrent, wading with naked legs through the water, or else seated upon the mule behind me, and all was again surprise, joy and laughter as before.

XXXI.

"I was so surprised, sir, at the sight of the country-people, the sky, the mountains, the woods, the waterfalls, and indeed everything I saw; all was quite new to me, for I had never before been out of Voiron, and scarcely ever out of my house, and all this seemed to me like enchantment. I admired everything, I questioned Cyprien about everything, I cried

out with astonishment at everything ! and yet I was afraid of nothing, because I was with him, But, if it must be confessed, sir, two or three times I made believe to be very much frightened at the sight of the precipices and the noise of the torrents ; so I cried out, and threw myself, with my hand on his shoulder, around his neck, that he might half support me, and that he might encircle me with his strong arm, and then I was no longer afraid."

"And did he not once snatch a kiss, Genevieve?"

"Oh ! no, sir, I assure you, he was too modest to do that, he did not kiss me along the road any more than my guardian angel would have done ; he was more red with shame than I was ; he did not touch me with his lips until his father said to him in the presence of all the company at table, in his mother's house : 'Come, Cyprien, kiss your betrothed !'

XXXII.

"We stopped sometimes, to let the mule rest in the shade, in the hollow of a rock, by the brink of the foaming waters. He broke off some small fir-twigs, and gave them to me to fan myself with them, and to drive away the flies from my cheeks. Once, indeed, when I was thirsty, he went and fetched me some water from the torrent, in the hollow of his two hands, which he arranged so as to form a cup. He raised them up towards me, and I stooped down and drank as I would have done from a spring. I could never satisfy myself with drinking thus ; it seemed to familiarize me with him who was to be my husband. I kept on drinking long after I had quenched my thirst, and he laughed and said : 'Well done ! Miss Genevieve, don't hurry yourself ; this is the way in which we drink up in the mountains when we are haymaking.' Then, when I had done, he drank after me, opened his hands, and threw some drops into my face to refresh me. This was the only thing that happened along the road.

"Oh ! how beautiful everything seemed in my eyes that morning ! the gorges through which it seemed impossible for the mule even to pass, so closely did the rocks and fir-trees approach one another, as if to block up the road ; the half-melted snows that leapt, like drowning lambs, from rock

to rock, crying out, howling, and hissing, just as if they had been living beings ! the branches of the fir-trees that extended over the pathway, and compelled me every now and then to bend down my head to the neck of the mule, for fear of losing my head-dress and my comb ; the precipices all adorned with red, blue, and yellow flowers, such as I had never seen in the gardens of Voiron ; the white foam that we could see at the bottom, and which looked as though floods of milk had fallen down from heaven ; the rainbows which extended like bridges from one side of the precipices to another, and appeared beneath instead of above us : the little fogs which incessantly rose above the pines, and then became clouds, and burst out into thunder and lightning, and storm, for a quarter of an hour, but quickly disappeared like Josette's air-bubbles, and discovered to our view afterwards a spotless sky of blue ; I could not tire of looking at all these things, and I said to myself : ' How lovely the world is ! ' I could have wished to remain there for ever, and not go on to my journey's end. Cyprien had seen these things all his life, sir, and yet he was in no greater hurry to proceed than I was, and he said to me : ' Genevieve, you will think that I am not telling the truth, but I declare to you that the country never before seemed to me so beautiful as it does now that I am with you. I don't know why it should be so, but so it is.' And he was continually saying that the mule went too fast because he knew he was travelling towards his meadow, and he continually found some reason for stopping him, sometimes to tighten the girths, sometimes to drive a gad-fly off his neck, and sometimes to take a stone out of his foot. Oh ! he was very fond of his mule, sir ; don't you think he was ?

XXXIII.

"At last we arrived at the long red bridge over the stream which divides the wood of Montagnol from the wood of Valnoige, and then we heard gun-shots, that rolled like thunder through the ravines. 'Don't be frightened,' said Cyprien ; 'these are my relatives, who have walked on with the lads and lasses of the country to do you honour.'

"We met them on the middle of the bridge. There were

about thirty of them, both men and women, old and young. Father Cyprien was at their head. His son gave him the bridle of the mule. The children threw grains of wheat and corn-poppies under the feet of the animal, so that the planks of the bridge were quite covered with them; but I was redder than the poppies at seeing myself thus honoured like a queen making her triumphal entry into Jerusalem. I was only a poor servant, not yet twenty years of age, you know: was not this likely to humiliate me?

"I was led in this style from door to door, until we arrived at the church, where the vicar and the chorister stood ready to bless the betrothed, and when that was over, we went on to Father Cyprien's cottage, to greet my mother-in-law, and to taste the bread. In front of all the houses by which we passed there was placed near the door a little table, covered with a hempen cloth, on which were placed cakes, fritters, sweet pancakes, white wine, and bouquets of flowers. The mothers and their daughters were on the threshold of the door, and I had to take a piece of everything as I passed. This was the custom, and afterwards I was considered one of the country people.

"Cyprien's mother placed a three-legged stool for me, to assist me in getting down from the mule. She then took me by the hand, and, although she was quite lame, led me gravely first to the stable, then successively to the barn, the corn-loft, the dairy, the fountain, the wash-house, the bake-house, and lastly to the dwelling-house. There a long table had been placed, covered with wheaten cakes, baked meats, and jugs of wine. She led me up to the fire-place, where, over the fire, a number of saucepans were boiling; she made me touch the hook and the fire-dogs; and then she kissed me, and said to me a few words in the mountain dialect which I did not understand.

"I did not dare to make any answer, and if I had not seen Cyprien standing close behind me, with his relatives, I should have run away. The men sat down to table; the mother, the women, and I waited on them; only from time to time, Cyprien's father made me sit down by him on the bench, eat a little, and drink a glass of white wine with him; the rest of the time I gathered up my silk dress, and fastened it round my waist, turned up my sleeves, took off my head-dress, and went into the wash-house with the other women to knead the

cakes, wash the plates, and fill the bottles for the guests. 'She is not proud, and she doesn't mind work,' said the old women to Cyprien's mother; 'you are very fortunate; she will be a great help to you in doing the work of the house.'

XXXIV.

"When dinner was over, and only the old men remained at table, talking about all sorts of things over their wine, Cyprien took me to walk over his father's farm, into their pine-wood and meadow; the cows were feeding in the grass, which rose as high as their knees. He told me their names, one after another, and informed me at the same time of their good qualities and defects. 'That is the red one,' he said; 'she comes regularly twice a-day to be milked, of her own accord, and she yields about two pints at a time. That other one works like an ox; but she is always thin, and never eats from the rack; we call her *the servant*. That one is brindled with black and white; she is the handsomest, but she is as proud and capricious as a goat. The other one has sharp horns; you must beware of her, Genevieve; until she knows you, she will look at you with an unfavourable eye.' He warned me of every danger, sir, and told me how I might best succeed in making myself agreeable to his mother, and beloved by all the household. I thanked him, and said, 'Don't disturb yourself, Cyprien; I have been a servant all my life.' Then I admired the fir-trees, the barley-field, the fruit-trees, the hay-stacks, with their pointed thatch of grey straw, so that the snow might run off; the ducks in the pond, the fowls in the hen-yard,—indeed everything I saw; and I said to myself, 'I should have been contented to take Cyprien with less.' Then he led me back, quite delighted, to the house, where the old men were still drinking, although the sun was already high in the heaven, and showed me the room that he and I were to have above the stable. We went up to it by a ladder of deal, and there was a little passage leading to it, all wainscoted with shining maize, as if the wall had been made of gold. The room was low and small, constructed entirely of deal, like a box. 'Ah! how happy we shall be together here!' said I to myself. 'It is quite large enough for two.' I thought of leaving my little sister

to finish her apprenticeship at Voiron; for Cyprien had told me on the road that his mother would not hear of any one besides me being brought into the house. 'And then,' said I to myself, 'that poor child has always been petted so much that she does not know what labour is; she would suffer too much if she were made a peasant the rest of her life, after having been a young lady all her childhood.'

"We went down the ladder without saying anything further." The mule, ready harnessed, was waiting for us. Father Cyprien lifted me into the saddle. All the company went with me as far as the red bridge, and then Cyprien and I, betrothed and happy, returned to Voiron by the same road as we had travelled in the morning.

XXXV.

"We were more gay, sir, and more used to one another's company, now that we were plighted to one another, and had eaten and drank together and joined hands. We thought it would be a long time before the day of our marriage; but Cyprien promised to come to Voiron every Sunday and take me to mass, and afterwards for a walk in the fields; this would help the time to pass pleasantly.

"Oh! sir, how happy I was! and how joyous he was! He was not the same man as he had been in the morning, he looked in my face, and I looked in his. He broke off branches from all the flower-bushes to decorate the head of the mule; he spoke to all the people we met, with an air of joy and of good temper, like a man who wished to open his heart, which was too full of happiness, and give some to everybody. And when his friends asked him: 'What is it that you are leading to the town, Cyprien, so joyfully? Will you sell the load on your mule's back?' 'Oh! no,' he answered; 'it is my heart, I do not sell it, but I let it be taken prisoner.' And then they laughed together, and took a draught from his leathern bottle; and the passers-by said as they went along: 'Look at Cyprien; he is taking home his betrothed; Genevieve, the glazier's daughter. Faith, she is both a pretty and a good girl, and I wish him joy with her.' This is what they said, sir; excuse me for praising myself, but it happened so very, very long ago.

XXXVI.

"We amused ourselves for such a long time on the road, that night had fallen more than two hours when we arrived at the foot of the mountains near the bridge by the meadows of Voiron: Cyprien, whom the night rendered more bold, stopped on the bridge, close by the first house of the town. 'Here we are, Genevieve, at our journey's end,' said he, sorrowfully; 'we must bid each other farewell before we get into the street where everybody can hear us.' 'Yes! Cyprien,' replied I, 'let us bid each other good-bye here, and when you have taken me back to the door of my house, the place from whence you fetched me, you shall not even come in; you shall go away again without even whispering my name, so that evil tongues may have nothing to say against us.'

"Then, sir, he put his two arms on the neck of his mule, like a man during prayer-time rests his elbows on his pew in church; turned his head towards me, and I put my face near his, and he said, 'Farewell then, Miss Genevieve!' 'Farewell then, M. Cyprien!' I answered. Then he sighed very deeply, and I sighed too; and he said again, 'Good bye, Miss Genevieve,' and I repeated 'Good bye, M. Cyprien!' and so we went on for at least fifty times each: 'Adieu, Genevieve!' 'Adieu, Cyprien!' and sighed as many times without saying anything more. At last he raised his left arm and put it round my waist, and drew me towards him, and kissed me, and pressed me to his heart; and all was over. He took the mule by the bridle, walked on without turning back once and without speaking till we got to my door, lifted me off the mule, gave me back my key, then turned the head of the mule homewards, and set off without stopping to look back. But I saw that he was weeping, and I sat down for a moment all alone on the stone bench in the shade near my door, to cry also silently.

XXXVII.

"When I could no longer hear the clatter of the mule's hoofs upon the pavement, I took my key, unlocked the door, and went into my shop. Having struck a light and lighted my lamp, I went into the sleeping-room behind the shop, to

undress and go to bed. I made no noise, because I thought that my little sister, whom a neighbour had promised to put to bed, was already asleep, and I did not want to chat with her that evening, my heart was too full.

XXXVIII.

"I entered my room then as noiselessly as I could, taking care that my shoes did not creak; but on approaching the bed, sir, I saw two beautiful eyes wide open, looking fixedly at me with the greatest astonishment, as the lamp threw a stronger light on me as I advanced. It was Josette who was sitting up, leaning against the wooden tester of the bed, in her night-dress. She had not gone to sleep, and the poor child looked at me in terror without saying a word, as if I had been a phantom or a ghost. My voice dispelled the illusion.

"Oh! is it you, Genevieve?" cried she, spreading out her little arms towards me, and changing the expression of her face from terror to a smile.

"Yes, it is I; but why are you staring at me so? Am I different from what I was yesterday?"

"I had forgotten, sir, to take off my fine clothes, and they completely altered my appearance.

"No! you are not the same," said she, pouting her lips, "do you want to play a trick on me? Had you yesterday this fine silk gown that shines, sparkles, and changes colour like the neck of a pigeon in the sunshine? Had you these shoes that creak like those of the ladies at church? or that lace neckerchief? or that beautiful sash? or that head-dress, the lappets of which flap about your cheeks? or those ear-rings that hang down like two golden pears? or that necklace with the golden cross on your breast? Is it carnival time? or has some fairy come with her wand, as in the story that you read to me the other day, and changed you, on your way home, into a lady, and given you such beautiful clothes that I should be afraid to kiss you?"

"Dear me! it's true," thought I to myself, "the poor child has never seen me in this dress; she may well be astonished to see me so fine. I did not remember that I had my wedding clothes on."

“‘Why, then,’ she continued, ‘did you have such fine clothes made?’

“‘I was embarrassed: ‘because I have just been betrothed,’ I said, ‘and I am going to be married soon.’ And I set to work to undress myself while I was speaking, to take the buckles off my shoes, to unfasten the knots of my sash, to unpin my lace head-dress, to take off my ear-rings and my necklace, my handkerchief and my silk gown, to fold them all up carefully and to put them away in a drawer until the wedding-day. Josette watched me do this, with a look of wonder at all these fine things: Then, when I had done and said my prayers, and put on my night-dress ready to get into bed,—

“‘Oh! now,’ said she, ‘I love you much better, and I shall venture to kiss you.’

“‘She made room for me; I extinguished the lamp, and laid down in the bed by her side.

“‘Oh! now, you are good,’ said she, putting both her arms round my neck, as she was accustomed to do when about to go to sleep. But she was so agitated by the sight of all my finery, and by my absence during the whole day, and I was so wakeful through thinking of all I had seen and done, and of Cyprien, that neither of us could go to sleep.

“‘Well,’ said the malicious little creature, ‘I shan’t go to sleep, and I shan’t let you go to sleep until you have told me all about it. So you are going to get married, Genevieve?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘And to whom?’

“‘To M. Cyprien, whom you know very well, and who takes you upon his lap when he comes here.’

“‘Oh! so much the better,’ said she; ‘but M. Cyprien comes from the mountains. Is he going to live with us for the future?’

“‘I felt quite ashamed before the child, and I did not know what answer to give her. At last I thought: ‘Pshaw! I may as well tell her all at once!’

“‘No,’ I said, ‘he will remain in the mountains.’

“‘But you won’t go and live with him there?’

“‘Yes,’ I answered.

“‘You will go and live in the mountains?’

“‘Oh! yes, when I am married.’

“‘And me, too?’ cried she, clapping her hands together with joy, ‘shall I go and live among the mountains? Oh, I am so glad. I am so fond of M. Cyprien, and his dog and his mule, and the milk and the apples, and the birds and the butterflies! They say there are such numbers of them thereabouts. When are we going?’

“‘But you,’ I replied, though greatly embarrassed how to answer her, ‘you will not come with me, my child: you will remain at Voiron, with your mistress, and go on learning to make lace. She will bring you up with her own children; she will take great care of you, and I will come and see you very, very often; so that you will be quite happy.’”

“‘Naughty Genevieve!’ cried the child, ‘so you would leave me? You would have the heart to go away without me? me, who have never left you since I came into the world?—and have always lived, eaten, and slept with you, as if I were your own daughter; without me, who have not been able to sleep for a moment, to-night, because you were not with me in bed? Naughty Genevieve!’ repeated she, in an angry tone, striking me with her little hand, ‘if you had the heart to do that, you would not need to return often nor even once to Voiron to see me, for you would not find me here. I should soon be in the church-yard by the side of my mother. I should tell her that you had deserted me, and broken your word; you who always said that you promised her, on her death-bed, to be a mother to me, and never to leave me.’”

“And the poor child began to cry.

XXXIX.

“You will easily imagine, sir, that it pained me to hear my sister speak in this way; I began to accuse myself of having acted with levity and without consideration in consenting to marry Cyprien; for, indeed, the child was right. I had been as a mother to her, and had never left her even for a day during her whole previous life; and I had often told her of the promise that I had made to our mother, that I would die rather than forsake her; and yet I was going to marry and to leave her like an orphan to the care of a stranger! Oh! remorse choked my utterance, so that I

could neither speak, nor breathe, nor sob. I began to repent of the promise I had made to Cyprien ; and, nevertheless, I loved him so dearly, that I could not repent of having loved him. On one side was my sister, and the promise I had made to my mother in the presence of death and of God ; on the other side my betrothed, and the promise I had made that morning at the church in the presence of all the villagers. I tossed about in my bed, unable to escape either from the child or from the image of Cyprien, or from the shade of my mother, or from my own heart ! Ah ! sir, that was a terrible night ! the tortures that I endured were dreadful ! I blushed, I grew pale, a cold sweat poured over my limbs ; I burned, I froze again—I was in a fever ! and my sister turned towards me whenever I turned away from her, and continued to reproach me.

“ ‘ But,’ I at last said to her, kissing her, and taking her hands within my own, ‘ you will be very comfortable with the lace-maker, well lodged, well fed, well clothed, well taught like her own children. She is in good circumstances, her house is not like ours ; she has nice furniture and plenty of rooms, and a servant to do all the hard work ; what do you wish for more ? Can I afford to give you white bread to eat ?’ ”

“ ‘ What difference does it make to me,’ answered Josette, ‘ whether the bread is black or white, or my dress new or old ; or whether there are plenty of rooms and furniture, and a servant ? Feed me with straw, if you like, but take me with you. Away from you, I should be so unhappy, so desolate ! You speak of the lace-maker ; she gives her children plenty to eat, but if you only knew how she beats them ! Ah ! I should not have been there three days before she would beat me, and I should run away and throw myself into the river, like that little gipsy girl, whose body was found yesterday. What would you say when you heard that ? Would you be very happy at home in the mountains with your Cyprien ? Ah ! now I hate him. And what would my mother think of you, as she lies in her grave ?’ ”

“ I began to weep more bitterly at these words ; so she went on speaking more and more about my mother. Children, sir, always know how to argue. She perceived the impression that was made upon me by referring to the promise I

had made to my mother, and she continued to speak of it. This affected me, and when she saw me weeping and moved by her words, then she wound herself round me, put her arms round my neck, her lips to my face, and her limbs round my body, and embracing me tightly, and clinging as closely to me as she could, she said :—

“No, no, no ; you will never have the heart to tear me limb from limb, to drag me from you, and to throw me aside, like an old ragged dress, to be trampled upon ? No, Genevieve ! my sister, my nurse, my second mother ! Twice my mother, for you were so before as well as after the death of the first ! I will be so good, so gentle, so obedient. I will love you so much—I will embrace you continually, both day and night ! Oh ! tell me, tell me that you will not leave me !”

“I should have told her so, sir, to such an extent had she worked upon my feelings, as she lay clasping me in her little arms, but I thought of Cyprien, who had just left me in such a joyful mood, and who had not yet perhaps reached the foot of the mountains. ‘Oh ! heaven,’ I said to myself, ‘he was betrothed to me this morning, his parting kiss is still fresh upon my lips, and yet I am already false to him !’

“‘No, no, Josette,’ said I, unwinding her arms from my neck, and disengaging my body from hers, so that I might turn to the other side of the bed, and think ; ‘no, an honest girl should keep to her word, and I made an oath to Cyprien. Do not distress me any more !’

“‘An oath !’ said she, standing upright on the bed, ‘did you then make no oath to my mother ? Yes ! leave me at once, I will not sleep with you any more, I will go and sleep on her grave, and ask her whether she confided Cyprien or me to your care on her dying bed ? We will see what answer she will give !’

“And saying these words, sir, the little creature, mad with tenderness and anger, took a step to pass over my body across the bed and to jump upon the floor ; but her foot caught in the folds of the sheet, she fell head foremost on to the stone floor, uttered a loud cry, and remained motionless at the foot of the bed.

“Ah ! I shall never forget that cry, and the hollow sound of her fall upon the floor. I leapt out of bed ; I took her in

my arms ; I called her : ' Josette, Josette ! ' I carried her to the window that she might breathe the cool air ; it was no use, she lay as it were dead in my arms ! I placed her on the bed ; I threw water over her temples ; I took her hands in mine ; I put my mouth against hers ; she did not breathe, and she was becoming cold, as I remembered my mother had done when I was laying her out.

" ' Wretch that you are ! ' I cried to myself ; ' You have killed your sister ! ' and I fell down unconscious on the floor.

" How long I remained in that state I cannot tell ; but when I came to myself again, my sister was lying breathless and motionless upon the bed. I knelt down before her, laid my head upon her body, and prayed to God, and to all his angels and saints, and especially to my mother, to bring her to life again, and to take me in her place ! I was like one in a dream, sir, and yet I was awake. And it was then that I heard, as plainly as I now hear myself speak, my mother's voice sounding in my ear, but in a more severe tone than I had ever heard her use during her life-time, and saying to me : ' Cain ! Cain ! what hast thou done with thy brother ? ' as though she had read these words to me out of the Bible.

" I have often been told since that it was an illusion, an echo of the words which I had heard her utter in past times, and which recurred to my memory now that I was in despair ; but nevertheless, I heard these words so plainly that I answered immediately, just as I answer now when I am called.

" ' Mother ! mother ! ' I replied, ' do not condemn me ! I swear that if you will restore breath and speech to my sister, I will not marry, but devote myself entirely to your child ! '

" And I made a vow, sir,—an irrevocable vow within myself !

" The proof that my mother had really spoken to me, and that she had really heard my answer was, that I had scarcely made the vow in my heart ; before my little sister began to breathe, to stretch out her arms, to open her eyes as quietly as if she had been waking from sleep, and to say to me in a tone devoid of anger :—

" ' Genevieve, you will not marry Cyprien ; and you will never leave me, will you ? '

" ' No ! Never, never, never ! ' answered I, covering her

with kisses, and lying down again in the bed beside her, and warming her with my body, 'But how do you know that?'

"Something in my heart tells me so," said she.

"Then she kissed me again, and we kissed each other all night long, she laughing, and I weeping."

"Unhappy Cyprien! he had not yet arrived at the red bridge, and his mistress was lost to him! and perhaps he was singing merrily with his mule, without suspecting anything . . .

"But the agony and distress of mind that I suffered, sir! though I thought I was doing right. Ah! the world is like walking blindfold; we fancy we have taken the right turnings, and we go to the left. God alone can see to guide us aright!

.XL.

"At last Josette fell asleep, and slept as tranquilly as she had ever done in her cradle when a child; but I remained awake. The daylight began to gleam upon the bed: I was delighted to see her looking so pretty, with her beautiful hair lying all in disorder upon the pillow; but when my thoughts reverted to Cyprien, my heart sank, and tears rose into my eyes.

"I feel I should never have the courage to say to him: 'Cyprien, your Genevieve is a traitress!' The words would stifle me with grief and shame! No; and yet I must inform the poor fellow of what has happened. I will write to him, the paper will not blush!"

"I got up quietly, very quietly, that I might not wake Josette who was in need of repose, and I sat down to write to Cyprien by one of my windows that looked out on the mountains. Ah! I wasted a great many sheets of paper on that day, sir; for I wept so much; that no sooner had I written a line than I had to take another sheet, because the paper was all wet with my tears, and I should have put into the post a letter written with tears instead of ink. This happened at least ten times, until I had cried my eyes almost dry. At last I managed to write one that was pretty free from blots, though every here and there there were great stains of water."

"But, Genevieve," interrupted I, "how did you find words

to justify yourself? What did you say in this letter? I should very much like to know. Do you remember what you wrote?"

"Ah sir! well do I remember it. I never wrote another letter during the whole of my life, and I have kept a copy of it," replied she, pointing to her chest of drawers. "Cyprien's mother has got the original with the rest of her son's property."

"I should very much like to read it, Genéviève, if you have no objection; for the letter constitutes an important part of your history; and then it was not at all easy to write, I am sure, for even I, who, as you say, write so much, should have been very much puzzled what to say, if I had been in your place."

"There it is, sir," said she, taking it out of a corner of one of her drawers, in which it lay carefully wrapped up with some other treasures. She handed me the letter, sat down, and went on with her knitting.

XLI.

It was written on coarse, grey-coloured paper, like that in which confectioners and pastry-cooks wrap up boxes of sweetmeats for children. I could see that her tears had fallen upon it freely, for in many places the water had effaced or enlarged the strokes of the pen. The writing was in good round hand, and the lines very far apart. It had been folded in about thirty different ways of a most complicated, curious, and inextricable nature; like all the letters of poor people, who do not know how to fold up a letter simply when they have written it, and who rack their brains to devise some extraordinary fold. It had never been sealed. I read it in a low voice to myself; that I might cause the poor woman no unnecessary pain. It ran thus:—

"M. Cyprien,

"This is to tell you that you must not think any more about me for your wife. However, if you think as I do about the matter, it will give me much pleasure, provided we have nothing to reproach each other with; at least if you find no fault; I can find none with you; but it is all over.

God is not willing that I should marry you. But I will never marry any one else. I will tell you why. Indeed, I am very, very sorry, but it is not at all my fault . . .

"This night my little sister fell out of bed on to the ground. She was dead for I don't know how long. After I had taken her up and laid her on the bed, I lost consciousness too. My mother returned to earth; she said to me in an angry voice: 'Cain! what hast thou done with thy sister?'

"Then my little sister said to me: 'You will not marry M. Cyprien, will you?' I said: 'No, my mother!' and I made a vow; it is said, it is finished, there is no turning back. Ah! M. Cyprien, what will you think of me? I who loved your cows and your mule so much! Speak to them about me. Send me back the nosegay and the ring; here is the tassel of your hat, that you left upon the counter. Oh, dear! how grieved I am! No, I shall never survive. But do not you take it to heart, it is not worth while for you to grieve about it.

"I am very glad to tell you that all is well at home. I hope it is the same with you. Your father and mother have been very kind to a poor girl like me. It is a pity that there are not two rooms over the stable. The little girl would not have cost your mother much. She eats very little. All the evil comes from this. Give my respects to them. I am sorry for the expense they have been at on my account. Excuse me

"Adieu, M. Cyprien, think no more of me, and be happy!

"GENEVIEVE."

"When you come again to Voiron, do not ever pass through our street. It would make me ill even to hear the sound of your mule's hoofs.

"Farewell, M. Cyprien."

A flood of tears had here diluted the ink, but through the obscurity I could see written two or three times—

"Farewell, M. Cyprien."

XLII.

I returned the letter to her without saying anything, and she wrapped it up again, and replaced it in the drawer.

Poor girl! this was the written summary of a world of impressions of love, of recollections, of hopes, living yet annihilated within her heart. Sentiment exists, but it is deaf and dumb in the unlettered soul of the people.

XLIII.

Genevieve continued. "After having written the letter to Cyprien, I gave it to one of the little chimney sweeps who lived with the countryman of my betrothed, and told him to take it to Valneige. I gave him a new pair of wooden shoes for his trouble. When I had carefully placed the letter in the poor child's pocket, I felt that all my happiness was gone, and it seemed as though my heart had fallen from my hands at the same time as the letter.

XLIV.

"Then I went in-doors again, without knowing what I was about: my little sister was still asleep; so I went straight to my chest of drawers. I took my new shoes, my buckles, my knotted sash, my lace head-dress, my earrings, my jet necklace, and my silk gown, I tied them up in a bundle in a white napkin that was not marked with my name. I carried them all to the church of Vionn while there was no one there, and I laid them, without even being perceived by the sacristan, upon the altar of the Holy Virgin. I had pinned on to the napkin a little piece of paper on which I had written the word, *Vow!* All the countryfolks knew that that meant an offering to dress the Saint or the Madonna with. I said to myself: 'You must not keep any of that deceitful holiday and betrothal dress; it will make you think of your treachery towards M. Cyprien, and your misfortune; it would make you think about getting married to some one else, and perhaps abandoning your sister and breaking your vow. You would never be comfortable and happy while those clothes remained with you in the house. Give them to God, so that you will never be able to get them back again, and let there be an end of them!'

"When my little sister, on my return, asked to see them, I told her what I had done with them. She did not lament

their loss, sir, though she was very fond of fine clothes; but she threw her arms round my neck, and kissed me, saying:

"Well, Genevieve, you did right, I love you better without any clothes, than all that silk and finery in which I could hardly recognize you last night. If I had known that you had your wedding-dress there, in the drawers, I should have always expected that you would go and get married some day or other. But now, I defy you to get a husband; for who would have you in your camlet dress and your wooden shoes?"

"From that day forward, sir, the child attached herself to me as closely as if she had been part of my clothes; she was only twelve years and a half old, but she had as much sense as a girl of fifteen. She often used to make me laugh and cry, both at once. She became as wise as an angel, and as pretty as a little waxen Madonna! Only, she had some vanity, it is true, when I could not find my looking-glass on its nail by my window, I had no need to search for it, I knew well where it was; and then, it is only fair to say that everybody in Voiron was continually telling her that she was by far the handsomest girl in the country, and she already went by the name of the pretty lace-maker. This is very injurious to a young girl, sir, as you may imagine; especially if she has neither father nor mother living.

XLV.

"The fate of my letter, sir, was this. Cyprien's father sent a message to me by the chimney-sweep, to say, that he could not object to my determination, and that his son should not come to Voiron any more. 'And what did Cyprien say to you?' I asked of the messenger. 'Oh! miss, he said nothing; he was currying his mule at the stable door, and big tears fell from his eyes on to the animal's hide.' This was all that I heard about it for a long while.

XLVI.

"Two years and a-half passed by in this way, and we heard no more about one another than if we had both been dead. If he had seen me again, he would not have known me; for

grief had effaced all my transient beauty; I had lost all my colour, and was as pale as a sheet of paper. I worked late, I rose early, I wept all night, I almost starved myself to scrape together money enough to pay Josette's apprenticeship-fee and to buy her a wedding-outfit; I gave up walking in the fields, I never saw the sun except in the evenings when he shone for a moment over against the wall of my room. I had grown so thin that my dresses hung quite loosely about me, and my ring was continually dropping off my finger. I became narrow-chested, as you see, by continually stooping at my needle-work; and as I sat sewing, I used to think of Cyprien, and involuntarily say to myself: 'What is he doing now? Alas! if he were to meet me, what would he say? Would he believe that it was ever possible for him to fall in love with a girl so poor, so ugly, and so thin as I am?'

"The neighbours used to say: 'You are wasting away, Genevieve, like a candle set to burn during the night; do not work so much, child.' But it was not work, but sorrow that was killing me; joy had become a stranger to my breast.

"I used, however, to think sometimes that I had ceased to love M. Cyprien, because nobody ever mentioned his name to me now. My little mercery business, to which I had now added the trade of tailoress, was going on successfully. At fair times and on market days a great many peasant women from the mountains used to come and buy their things of me. I sold them ribbons and lace to make their head-dresses, I cut out their gowns for them according to the fashion of the country, I sold them collars, ear-rings set with imitations of precious stones, necklaces, brass rings, shining steel chains on which they could hang their scissors, and a thousand other things of all sorts. They used to say: 'Let us go to Genevieve's shop, she sells cheap, and she has a large assortment. And then we are not ashamed to talk with her, as we are in the shops in the high street; she is not proud, and she accommodates poor people.' This was what they said, and it was true, sir.

XLVII.

"One Saturday, sir—one Saturday morning in the last week of November, I was alone in the house making a dress for Josette, who was going to dance the next day at the wed-

ding of one of her young friends, when there came into the shop a young girl from the mountains, so beautiful that, excepting Joesette, I had never seen any one more prepossessing. Two old women, and a boy fifteen years old, who appeared to be respectively her mother, her aunt, and her brother, were waiting outside, and had sat down on the stone bench outside the door, while the young girl was making her purchases. There were two mules laden with panniers, out of which the boy had taken some bread, some wine, and some chestnuts, which he and the women were eating in the street.

"The young girl looked at, touched, and examined everything in the shop, rings, ear-pendants, chains of gilt copper, lace, neckerchiefs, silks, kid-shoes—you would have said that there was nothing too good for her. 'How much is this? How much is that? I will take so many yards of this, and so many of the other;' and then, 'these jewels, and these buckles, and these ribbons; and this, and that?' She had laid her purse on the counter,—it was full of three-franc pieces and other silver coins. I thought she was going to buy up all my stock.

"And then her brother came and took away her purchases, and arranged them all, very neatly, in one of the panniers of his mule.

"That is not all, Miss Genevieve," said the pretty peasant girl, blushing very becomingly. "I was told that you are a dressmaker; so you must take my measure for three dresses, six collars, two lace head-dresses, an apron, and half-a-dozen stomachiers; and you must try on my ear-rings and my shoes."

"With great pleasure, miss," said I; "come with me into the next room, and then no one will be able to see you take off your things."

"And she came with me into my bedroom; and there I tried on her new shoes, and undressed her that I might put on her new collars, and neckerchiefs, and dresses. Ah! sir, what a beautiful creature she was! What pretty hands she had got, and pretty feet, and pretty shoulders, and a neck like white satin, and hair that fell down to her knees; and a full face, as red and velvety as a peach; and such eyes! such a mouth! and such teeth! and with all this, so gentle and modest an

air, and a tone of voice that went straight to the heart. I never grew tired of looking at her when she cast down her eyes, and I said to myself: 'Here is a happy creature! She must have had a great many suitors, I'll warrant. But, who knows, perhaps she is going to marry a rich old rascal; or perhaps a widower, who will praise up his first wife to her continually; or perhaps a relation—a cousin, who, though young, is ugly and vicious, and does not love her. The world is such a lottery, that real pairs never hardly meet, the more's the pity!'

"Then, while I was kneeling down to fasten her silver buckles on to her shoes, I said: 'Are you going to be married, miss? if it is not an impertinent question.'

" 'Yes,' she replied, with a proud and hurried sound of voice, as if she had expected my question; and was impatient to answer it. 'I was betrothed last spring, and I am going to be married next week.'

" 'Indeed!' continued I, in a coaxing tone, for I had taken such a liking to her that I could not help flattering her in all sincerity; 'indeed! and are you glad you are going to be married?'

" 'I should think so,' said she; 'I have good reason to be glad. Ask all the mountaineers if my betrothed is not the most honest lad in the country.'

"I had now finished fastening on the buckles, and I rose up quite pleased at being able to serve so pretty a girl; I made her sit down on the bed, I buttoned on her collar, I arranged her long hair neatly under her head-dress, I put on her ear-rings, I pinned the finest of her stomachers over her breast, I took down the mirror from the window, put it into her hand, and said to her:

" 'Look at yourself now, and tell me if your betrothed would be pleased at your appearance?'

" 'Oh! he doesn't care about these things,' she said. 'he loves me so much. He would be satisfied with me if I had none of these ornaments. I put them on on account of the people at church, you must know; it is to do honour to my country, for I will not have it said that the girls of Montagnol make a poorer appearance on their wedding-days than the girls of Valneige.'

" 'You come from Montagnol, then?' said I.

" 'Yes, and I am going to marry a lad of Valneige, who is well known to everybody in Voiron. I'll warrant that you know him both by sight and by name, for it was he who told us to come and make our purchases at your shop.'

" 'Is it father Cyprien's son?' asked I.

" My fingers trembled so at the mention of this name, that I pricked her beautiful neck with the needle with which I was trying to tack on her stomacher; I became redder than she was, and immediately after whiter than my sheets.

" 'What is the matter, Miss Genevieve, that you tremble so?' asked she, wiping off the drop of blood, but without appearing at all angry with me.

" 'Nothing, miss,' answered I; 'only I am so ashamed and sorry for having pricked you so.'

" 'Oh! heaven, said I to myself, continuing to attire her, but with an unskilful hand, and with a cloud before my eyes, 'who would ever have said that I should dress out my lover's betrothed for his wedding day, and that when he took off her ear-rings and unbuttoned her collar after mass, it would be my handiwork that he would touch upon the neck of his bride?'

" 'I tried to speak to her again two or three times, but I could never say more than 'yes,' or, 'no;' nevertheless I felt pleased, and took pains to keep, for one reason or another, this pretty creature for a long while in my room, and to make her look as beautiful as I could for Cyprien. 'You smile,' said I, quite in a low voice, to myself; 'well, so much the better! why did you deceive him? It is only fair that he should now love some one far prettier than you, and that you should, with your own hands, help him to take his revenge upon you!'

" When all was finished, sir, she went away, saying that her brother would return and fetch her dresses and aprons on the following Saturday; and I set to work night and day, thinking, at every stitch I took, that it was for Cyprien.

" For a long while after this, I heard nothing more of him; and that was very hard. What do you think, sir? was it not?

XLVIII.

" However, I must be just: my little sister, who saw how

I grieved, though I never said a word to her about Cyprien, comforted me more and more every day by her gentleness & her affection for me, and her beauty. I was like her mother, and she was like my daughter, only she did not entertain for me that respect for the authority of a mother which always puts a little check upon friendship. I was, as it were, the mother whom Josette had chosen voluntarily for herself, and towards whom she felt no reserve, no coldness of respect. I was at once her mother, her sister, and her friend. You will imagine how dear she was to me, sir, who had brought her up from her infancy; she was my nursing, my whim, my vanity, my toy, my idol! And then if you could only conceive, sir, how attached you become to persons for whom you have made great sacrifices! You are as attached to them, sir, as a miser is to the interest of his money. You say to yourself. 'I have laid up my treasure there; it must return to me all that it has cost me.' This feeling is natural to man, and it was a part of my nature. Come, I must acknowledge that I took a miser's care of Josette's heart."

XLIX.

"What philosophy," said I to myself, while listening to Genevieve, "there is in the simple heart, and even in the language, of this poor girl. La Bruyère or Pascal could not have thought more justly, or expressed their thoughts more clearly."

The interval that she allowed to elapse between the end of this part of her story and the beginning of the part she was about to relate, gave me time to make this reflection, for she was silent for a long while, as if uncertain whether she should go on, and she breathed three or four times more deeply than usual, as if her heart were struggling against some heavy weight of sorrow which she had not strength to shake off. At length she said:

"Pshaw! I promised to tell you all, and so I will, even though it makes me weep."

I.

"Time had passed rapidly by, and Josette would be sixteen years of age at Martinmas. She was as mature for her age

as a plant which has never been roughly handled, but which has been always kept in a warm place by the fireside, and covered up with moss in winter-time. You would have said that she was eighteen. Her mind was as fully developed as her face; she could read, write, cypher, sing, dance, sew, embroider, and make lace, as well as the first lady of the land, and she used to dress like a little queen. The tradesmen's wives and daughters were jealous of her, and used to say: 'Look at that little Josette! she is vain because she knows she is pretty. She has the impudence to dress her hair in the fashionable style, to wear a tortoise-shell comb, imitation pearl ear-rings, a coral necklace, and long gloves upon her arms. One would think that at least she was a confectioner's or a draper's daughter! You know what she is,—only the daughter of a poor glazier.' She cannot always boast of having bread in the house, and yet she is insolent enough to walk out in the sunlight dressed in yellow and green, and carrying her head as high as a hollyhock! What can we dress our daughters with, if mercers like her go about with the whole contents of their shops upon their backs?

"I used to hear all this, sir, for it was always repeated to me by my neighbours. And yet it was not a just complaint, for it was not her dress that attracted attention to her, it was her beauty. She used to dress merely, but without any attempt at luxury or show. But she was so lovely, that she really imparted a charm to all her clothes; if you had dressed her in black, you would not have been able to hide her loveliness. It was in her eyes, it was in her mouth, it was in her complexion, her figure, her gait, her attitude, indeed in everything about her! She was like the glow-worm; the more you cast her into the shade, the more brilliantly she shone. She could not help it, poor child, no more could I. Sometimes she would come in from a walk in the fields with her cousins, quite confused, and not go out again for the whole evening. She would say to me, pointing her pretty lip:

"It annoys me."

"What annoys you, Josette?" I would answer.

"Why everybody follows me, as if I were a curious animal, and everybody turns back to look at me when I have passed."

"But this did not offend me, sir, and in reality, I was

pleased at it. God has punished me severely for the prize I took in that lovely child, as you will soon hear.

LI.

"However, she was very prudent and very modest. Only, she was rather fond of dancing, and when her cousins came to invite her to Sunday-evening parties or to weddings, she could not contain herself for joy. She saw no harm in it; but the movement, the music, the heat, the waltzing, the whirling round, intoxicated her. When she came home again at midnight, accompanied by her aunts or her cousins, I could never get her to sleep; she would waltz in her dreams all night long. This was her only fault; I never could accuse her of any other. And it was a very innocent fault, sir, was it not? For, in fact, when the heart is empty, the feet are light, and when the wind blows, the dust rises!

"Well, sir, it was nevertheless this fault that caused her ruin."

"How! her ruin!" cried I.

"Alas! yes, sir, as you will soon see; and mine too," she added.

I listened more attentively.

LII.

"It was during the spring of 18—, sir; a regiment of soldiers was stationed at Veiron, to keep guard over the frontier. Ah! what a fine body of men they were! They were all young, sir, like you; tall, active, with fine figures, fresh complexions, and black moustaches; they wore boots of polished leather, jingling steel spurs, green coats faced with black, helmets that glittered in the sun like the weathercock on the steeple at Veiron, plumes that hung down over their necks, and that floated about in the air when they were running, like the tails of their white horses! It was grand to see them on review-days manœuvring in the fields, coming, going, charging, galloping along, sword in hand, to the sound of the trumpets, at the voice of their commanders. You might have said that a river of polished steel had overflowed its banks and inundated the meadows. Everybody

went to see them ; and they were very much liked in the town, because the soldiers are always good to their friends, though they are terrible to their enemies. They were quartered upon the artisans and tradespeople ; but no one complained ; on the contrary, every one said : ' My son is perhaps lodged in the same way with some poor people who live near another frontier. I must take good care of my soldier, so that others may be equally kind to my son ; it is only fair to do so.' Everything they needed was willingly given to them : lodging, fire, candles, white wine, and friendship into the bargain.

" No soldier had been quartered upon us, sir, because it was said that we were only two young girls, and that we had only one room behind the shop. The mayor was a considerate man.

LIII.

' At last one day there returned from parade a young quartermaster, trotting along sword in hand, at the head of his company. The nail of one of the fore-shoes of his horse somehow dropped out, and the shoe became quite loose. The horse, embarrassed by the shoe that was hanging from his foot, made a false step and fell, throwing his rider against the stone bench before our shop, where he lay motionless. His company, riding along at full speed, could not pull up short, and the horses trod over their fallen leader. When he was picked up, he was all covered with blood, and gave no sign of life ; we all thought he was dead, and he was laid down upon the stone bench. Josette and I, sir, pitied him, and wept at his misfortune, although we did not know him. He was such a handsome young man ; he did not seem to be twenty years old ; there he lay, his eyes closed, his forehead cut in two places by two wounds, from which the blood was welling out, over his pale cheeks. His hair was as black, but much finer, than the plume of his helmet, and his features were as delicate as those of a young girl. He was a man of high family, who was serving in the army for his amusement, and he had been made a quartermaster, in order that he might be promoted to be an officer in a few months. Ah ! you should have seen how fond his soldiers were of him. They all cried over him, as they unbuttoned

his coat, took off his battered helmet, untied his cravat, and opened his shirt, which was made of the finest linen. Some of them threw water over his pale face, and others ran to fetch the surgeon of the regiment. He soon arrived, felt his pulse, and said :

“ ‘There’s no great harm done, so carry the quartermaster very gently into that house, lay him on a bed, and I shall soon have him cured.’

“ ‘I did not dare to say anything for fear of offending the soldiers ; but I was very glad, and so was Josette. If it had been our brother, we could not have grieved more than we did at the fall, the fainting, the pallor, and the blood of this handsome young soldier. We opened the door of our room, and two of the men carried him to the bed :

“ ‘We shall only have to pay for the washing of an extra pair of sheets,’ said I to Josette:

“ ‘We went into the shop and remained there quite trembling while the surgeon was dressing his wounds. However, we listened at the door, and soon heard him draw a long breath, and say to the surgeon ‘Where am I?’ Then we heard the surgeon answer :

“ ‘In the house of some good women, my dear Septime. (His name was Septime de * * *) You must remain here for a few days. You have dislocated your shoulder, and got a lot of bruises on your head, besides having given your whole body a shock that it will take some days of perfect quietude to subdue. It would be dangerous to remove you to your quarters just now ; but in a fortnight you shall be on horseback again. Good bye ! I must go and make my report.’

“ ‘He then came out and told me to avoid disturbing the invalid by any noise, and not to give him anything else but water mixed with a few drops of a liquid which he gave me. I felt quite delighted at having to nurse this young man whom Providence had sent me ; and I said to Josette :

“ ‘You must go and sleep at your aunt Mariette’s with your cousin. I shall stay at home to sit up and watch my patient.’

“ ‘This was how we managed, sir ; and for eight days I had the pleasure of keeping watch over the poor wounded man ; he was so gentle and so thankful !

LIV.

"Josette used to come back early in the morning from her aunt's, to help me to keep the house tidy, and attend to the shop. From time to time she would ask leave of the invalid to go across the room, and get her linen, her thread, her scissors, and her thimble, out of her drawers. The young man would look attentively at her, and beg her pardon over and over again for having turned her out of her room; and she cast down her eyes and said :

"Don't mention it, sir, we are only too happy to see that you are comfortable here; you need not be in any hurry to go away on our account; we only wish the room were more nicely furnished, and the bed a better one."

"Then she came out covered with blushes and trembling all over, and said to me :

"M. Septime is well again, his colour has returned to his face."

"Oh! then, you have been looking at him," said I.

"No," she answered, "but I saw him."

"And every now and then she found out that she wanted something, and that she must go into her room again to fetch it. It was her fate! I used to say to her :

"How foolish you are, Josette; don't you see you are disturbing the invalid needlessly?"

"Oh! no," she would reply; "it does not seem to disturb him, he has not once complained. He looks so very kind, and indeed he said to me just now : 'Miss, I have a sister very much like you, and when you are in the room, I fancy that I am at home in my mother's house. However,' he added, 'she is not yet so pretty as you.'"

"This began to cause me some uneasiness, but I said to myself : 'It will soon be over; in ten days the sick man will be well again, the regiment will go away, and she will think no more of him. An officer! he is not the man for her; the needle is too mean to mate with the sword.' But for all that I began to wish that his horse had fallen before some other person's door."

LV.

"At the end of a few weeks the young man got well ; and meanwhile the system of going and coming, of looking at each other, and of talking to one another, had been kept up between my sister and the invalid. At last he was so far recovered that he could be without danger removed to the hospital. We were sorry to see him depart, for we had got used to him, and were like sisters to him. He thanked us gratefully ; and the tears stood in his eyes when he bade us good-bye. He promised to come and see us frequently as soon as he was able to walk about again." I hardly knew what to think of this ; I would have much preferred that he should not come to see us, but I did not dare to tell him so ; for it would have been unkind, and would have made poor Josette weep bitterly.

LVI.

"He had no sooner gone out of the house than a great change came over my poor sister. I hardly knew her ; she was like a body without a soul. You would have said that her face was here, and her mind somewhere else. She did nothing but go out and come in—go to her cousin's and come back again, so that she might have an opportunity of passing twenty times a-day in front of the hospital-garden, in which she could see the patients sitting on chairs in the sunshine, on the other side of the wall. When she was in the shop, she looked more frequently in the glass than at her work, and she turned red and pale by turns, if she only happened to hear a soldier's spurs jingle upon the pavement. She dreamed all day long, and was continually dropping her lace out of her hands ; she forgot to pin her cushion ; she got up, as if with the intention of fetching something out of her bedroom, and returned without bringing anything. She ate very little, and slept very little, but spent the night in sighing. I used to say to her :—

"What's the matter with you, Josette ?"

"Nothing," she always answered.

"I am sure something is the matter with you. It's very silly of you to think about him. Is he at all a match for poor girls like us ? Is he not a man of good family, who

would never marry any one but a lady of his own rank ! Can he take you with him from garrison to garrison, and even to war, behind his horse or in his portmanteau ? Come, dearest, be reasonable, and think about your luco !

“ ‘ Can we think about what we please ? ’ she would answer, sorrowfully.

“ I saw clearly that these young creatures, like Cyprien and myself, had talked to each other without saying anything. But I thought to myself : ‘ Pooh ! it is a silly idea—an April flower ; it will soon fade, and go away with the regiment.’

LVII.

“ ‘ M. Septime, the quartermaster, had got well ; and from time to time he came to our house to thank his hostesses. You should have seen how happy Josette was on those occasions ; it really seemed as though the sun had come into the shop with him. He sat down in front of the counter, and played with the handle of his sword ; he laid his helmet on a chair, and she combed out the plume. She adjusted his aiglets, and he picked up her reels of thread, and held her box of pins for her, whilst she marked out her design upon her cushion ; and then it was M. Septime this, and Miss Josette or Miss Josephine that, for she began to like to be called Josephine now, as it flattered her : and then they laughed, and then came half-words and sighs, and then silence, and then conversation would be renewed in a low tone. I could not find fault with them, sir, for the quartermaster was so gentlemanlike and so sincere, and poor Josette was so happy and so tender ; and what was more, so affable and so obedient to me. All I could do was to ask myself : ‘ When will this regiment take its departure ? ’

LVIII.

“ It seemed as if it were never going. No ill-natured or malicious remarks were made about the frequent visits of the quartermaster to us, because, although poor, we bore a good character in the neighbourhood ; and then, though you would hardly believe it, sir, everybody thought that he was paying his addresses to me. They said ; ‘ Josette is too young—

she is a mere child—she thinks about nothing : but Genevieve is old enough, and though she is not pretty, she is amiable and nice-looking. Well ! she will have a handsome husband, upon my word.’

“This is what gave rise to this mistake : lovers are so cunning, you know. The quartermaster spoke to me only when we were in the street ; and he spoke of me alone to the neighbours and his comrades ; when he knocked at the window he used to call for Miss Genevieve, and when he came to fetch us on holidays, to go for a walk, he gave his arm only to me. He was full of politeness, of attention, and of respect for me, as if he were desirous to flatter me, and enlist my self-love in his favour. I well knew his reason for doing so ; he wanted to make me more disposed to favour him, and more indulgent to his visits. He couldn’t deceive me, sir ; but I was very kind-hearted, I saw no harm in it, and I did not wish to give pain to these two young creatures, so I let them go on. I was always thinking : ‘A good trumpet-blast, some morning or evening, will deliver me from all this politeness !’ But the neighbours really thought he was in love with me.

LIX.

“At length, one evening during the month of May, the news spread through Voiron ; ‘The regiment is going away to-morrow.’ Poor Josette ! her arms fell listlessly down by her side, and she grew paler than the lace she was working. Then I almost wished that the regiment would remain for ever.

“Ill luck would have it that, just at that moment, I was asked to go as quickly as I could and watch over a sick neighbour, who, it was said, would not live through the night. Her little children came crying to me, and pulled me by the apron to go and alleviate the sufferings of their poor mother. I went instantly, sir ; only staying to recommend Josette to shut up the shop early and go to bed.

“‘The regiment will not start until eight o’clock to-morrow,’ I said to her ; ‘we will go and see it off, and bid farewell to M. Septime. I don’t want you to see him this evening while I am away ; it would grieve you too much—you would not be able to sleep afterwards.’

“ ‘Ah! I do not want to see him,’ she answered; ‘I have seen him only too often; it would wring my heart to part with him. I would much rather that you should say to me to-morrow: ‘He is gone, and all is over!’ I shall pray that he may have a prosperous journey, and that he may think of me till he returns.’

“ ‘Very well,’ I said; and kissing her, I went away.

LX.

“ The next morning, sir, when I returned home, I found Josette still asleep, or else pretending to be so. This surprised me. Willing to keep my promise, I said to her:—

“ ‘Come, and let us see the regiment off.’

“ ‘No,’ she answered, ‘I would rather stay at home and go to sleep again; I have been crying so much, that everybody would observe my red eyes, and that would make me ashamed. I have not the heart to go.’

“ ‘Well,’ said I, drawing the curtains close, so that the sun might not shine upon her head, ‘remain at home—tell your beads—go to sleep and console yourself—I shall go to work.’

“ Nothing more passed between us with regard to the departure of the regiment, only I was very much astonished that M. Septime did not come to bid us good-bye. But I thought that he would feel too sorry to be able to do this, and that he had preferred writing to us from his next quarters.

“ ‘Matters went on very quietly for two or three months. Josette was as prudent, reasonable, and orderly as a nun. She never went out except to go to church, or to fetch from the post-office, once a week, the letters from the quartermaster. They were engaged to be married, sir; she did not tell me so, but I felt sure of it. She wrote to him long letters every Sunday in her room; but she would not confess it. I found it out, though, by the paper that was missing from the shop, when I counted the leaves. I let this go on—Love must have its way,’ said I to myself—‘it soon passed over between M. Cyprion and me, and it will soon be over for my poor sister. When she has forgotten M. Septime, or M. Septime ceases to think of her; well! there are numbers of fine lads in the country; she will get a sweetheart; they will

"be married, and I shall go and live with them, to keep the house in order and take care of the children. That will be the end of it!"

LXI.

"But I was quite wrong, sir. One evening, while Josette was at her aunt's, I received a letter sealed with a black seal. I opened it, and what did I read? I have got it still, sir, in my drawer with the other; there it is—read it."

I took the letter and read:—

"MISS GENEVIEVE,

"Quartermaster Septimus de * * * was killed in the very first skirmish we had on disembarking at * * *. Just before his death he said to me: 'Write to Miss Genevieve at Voiron, to bid her and her sister farewell for me. I am very much to blame; but I am more unfortunate than guilty . . . I beg her to pardon me. If I had lived, I would have repaired the involuntary wrong I did her. I was not evilly-disposed, oh! no; the farewell, the night, and the despair we felt at being separated, intoxicated us . . . I married her secretly before a priest from Savoy . . . Fatal night! She must send the child to my relations at * * *'

"Death here deprived him of utterance. I send you a lock of his hair as a remembrance. He said to me before the engagement: 'If I die, you must be sure to send this to Voiron.'"

LXII.

"The lock of hair fell to the ground with the letter, sir; for I paid attention only to the news of the death of this unhappy and brave young man, and to that terrible sentence which revealed to me the whole mystery of their love, and all the disgrace of our family: 'She must send the child to * * *'

"'Oh! God,' said I, to myself; 'what! my sister! Is it possible! . . . She, so good and so pious! . . . She to have deceived me thus! . . . Ah! she is sufficiently punished!' I thought immediately, 'Unfortunate girl! what will become of her when she hears of the death of him . . . shall I say of her seducer—of her husband? . . . Of him, who is alas!

the father of the child that she bears in her womb ! And what will become of her ? And how can we make the matter known ? And how can we conceal this disgrace ? Whither shall we fly ? In what part of the earth shall we hide ourselves ? My God ! my God ! come to our assistance !”

“I felt moved with anger against my sister. ‘How,’ said I to myself, ‘from me who have been her mother from me, who, for her sake, have renounced my love, my fortune, my happiness, my Cyprien from me, who never have left her any more than her shadow by day, or more than the wall of her room or the mattress of her bed by night from me she could conceal it all ; her love, the priest fetched from Savoy, the night, the secret marriage, the anguish, the terror, the fearful consequences of that mysterious union ! Ah ! is not this deceitful ? is not this traitorous ? is not this mistrustful of her sister ? . . . I will never speak to her again—I will never see her again—I will go away and leave her ! But if I do not speak to her ; if I never see her again ; if I leave her, what will become of her ? No, I must remain ; and if I look angrily at her at the moment when I must tell her of her lover’s death, and when she will need to take refuge in the only arms which are open to her in the whole world, to conceal her despair and shame, her child will die in her womb from her anguish and convulsions ! And then, is she not still my sister, my little one, my Josette, my child, whom I have brought up, and who has no mother beside me, just as I have no daughter beside her ?’

“And I burst into tears, and sobbed so long that my head got disturbed, and my senses wandered, and I fell from my chair, unconscious, on to the floor.

LXIII.

“I remained in this state for I don’t know how long, sir, but it must have been a very long time, for it was night when I came to myself. I was awake by a terrible cry that seemed to issue from a heart pierced by its death stroke ! a cry that will never cease to resound in my ears—O God ! such a cry ! I opened my eyes, and saw Josette holding the lock of hair and the letter in her left hand, while with the other she was

tearing her hair and beating her breast like a mad girl. Fortunately the door was shut, and one little lamp only lighted the room; Josette had not seen me, for I had fallen from my chair behind the counter, and was huddled up in the shade in the corner by the wall.

"At sight of her, on hearing her cry, on beholding her furious and excited gestures, I felt that she knew all, sir; I darted to her, caught her up in my arms, and laid her on the bed. I had not the courage to utter a single reproach. Alas! the poor child! she was wretched enough already. She could not even recognize me; she thought that I was M. Septime! and she kissed me, and talked to me as if I had been he.

"'Oh! you are not dead,' said she, laughing strangely. 'Oh! tell me that you are not dead! Tell me! Is it not your hand that is passing so gently over my forehead?' . . .

"And so she went on, lavishing upon me all the tender names, soft speeches, and caresses that delirium could suggest to her. Sometimes she would recognize me for a moment, and put her finger over my mouth, and say:

"'Hush! you mustn't say anything about it; it is a secret. We are married, you know; but he does not wish any one to hear of it until after the campaign is over, and then he will tell his mother and take me home to his house!' . . .

LXIV.

"Poor girl! she believed all she saw! she was so young, so simple, so innocent! Then, suddenly, she would rise up in the bed, with hair dishevelled, and her eyes gleaming more brightly than the lamp; and she would push me away from the bedside.

"'Begone! begone!' she cried, 'I will see no one; he is dead; he is laid in the co'u ground; I will be buried with him, I will be wrapped in my shroud, and three crosses shall be planted to-morrow on my tomb in the cemetery!'

"Then she actually wrapped up her head in the sheet, and lay there as motionless as a corpse. It was useless for me to call to her, for she did not answer, or else she only said,

"'Silence! I am dead!'

"She was in a terrible fever; but I was afraid to send for the doctor or the neighbours, lest the thing should become

known. I poured a soothing medicine down her throat; I talked to her, I kissed her, I tried to comfort her as well as I could, I wept with her and over her. I prayed to God, kneeling at the foot of her bed, and holding her cold feet in my hands. Ah! what a night that was! . . . Since the night on which I had given up Cyprien, I had suffered nothing like it.

"Towards morning, her convulsions, her cries, and her delirium ceased, and she fell asleep with her eyes brimful of tears. I thanked God. When she awoke, it was very late in the day; her reason had returned to her, but she was no more the same person. She had grown at least five years older during that single night; her voice was so low that you could hardly hear it, and her face had become as pale as mine. She sat up in bed, with her eyes fixed upon the lock of hair which she held in both hands underneath the coverlid. I had washed my eyes and dressed myself properly to serve my customers as usual in the shop, so that no one might suspect anything. I was frequently asked.

" 'Where is Josette?'

" 'She is poorly and obliged to remain in bed,' I would answer; 'these young creatures are much more delicate than we are.' Or else: 'She has gone out on an errand.' Or else: 'She has gone to church to hear a mass said for her mother. And a thousand reasons of the same kind.

"Things went on in this way for several days, during which the poor girl, sometimes in bed, sometimes sitting up in a chair in the bedroom, with her head resting on her arm, continued to weep as though her heart would break. I went in to comfort her a hundred times a-day, and all the night.

" 'Oh! how good you are!' said she to me, 'I have deceived you, I have dishonoured you, and yet you console me!'

"She had been very imprudent, sir, it is true; but she had such a good heart! I think that after her misfortune I loved her more than ever.

"After the lapse of eight or ten days, she resumed her ordinary life with me in the shop, and went on making her lace. Only she no longer chatted and laughed with every one that came in, as she used to do formerly. When she was not present, the neighbours used to say to me:

“ ‘Your little sister is becoming serious, Miss Genevieve; she is beginning to reflect, so you must think about getting her married. When the fruit is ripe, the flower falls; when wine has reached a certain age, it no longer crusts.’

“You will imagine how it grieved me to hear them talk thus; but no one suspected anything. The house looked just as it used to do in old times. Only the people of the quarter used to say: ‘Genevieve ought to think about marrying her sister, for she is quite old enough now.’ And the ladies of Voiron used to pass on Sundays before our window and say to their parents: ‘I should love her very much, if she would let me.’

LXV.

“Meanwhile, sir, fancy how sad we both were! Time was passing away, and it was nearly seven months since the regiment had left. Josette never went out of doors now, and as she always sat working by my side, behind the counter, people could only see her pretty face, and so they entertained no suspicions about her misfortune. I had long been talking to the neighbours about a vow that I had made, and that I intended to go with my sister, in a few weeks’ time, on a pilgrimage to the chapel of Saint Bruno on the Grande Chartreuse. This was the custom of the country, sir, so no one had any fault to find; on the contrary, every one said: ‘Those two young girls are very pious; they fear neither the distance nor the snow, that they may go and pray to the saint.’ I thus accustomed them to the idea of our absence, and I said to them:

“ ‘You will be kind enough to take charge of the shop for us for a few days, won’t you?’

“ ‘Oh! yes,’ they answered.

“This was only a trick, sir; for my real intention was to take some money that I had got together, by selling my goods at a loss, and to go some night with my sister to Grenoble or Lyons, where she might be secretly delivered in a hospital; to put the child out to nurse, after having marked it well, so as to take it back when it was weaned, and to return home with Jo ette, so that no disgrace might attach to our name. For the rest, I trusted to the mercy of God. I said to myself: ‘If she never gets over her sorrow, well! she can remain un-

married, and bring up the child as an orphan that had been placed at our door during the night; and if, in a few years' time, she does get over it, and the child dies, well! her reputation will not be destroyed in consequence of a fault for which young girls are never pardoned; and at some future time, perhaps, she may win the affection of some honest man, who will forgive her a marriage which she believed to be legitimate, and will consent to marry her; and they will be married, and all will be forgotten.' These were the castles that I had built in the air. Josette did not like being obliged to hide herself, she wished to tell every one boldly: 'Yes! I was his wife, and I shall soon be the mother of his child.' When girls are passionately in love, they consider their love an honour rather than a disgrace. But I said to her:

"The name and the honour of the family do not belong to you alone; do you wish to dishonour and destroy me together with yourself? Do you wish to disgrace the memory of our poor mother, and cast a slur on the reputation of our brother in his regiment? Do you wish it to be said: 'See how well her mother brought her up! and how well her sister took care of her! there goes the brother of the two bad girls of Voiron!'"

"She understood this reasoning, sir, and agreed to what I said, and promised all I wished.

LXVI.

"But, sir, there is an old and a true saying: Man proposes, but God disposes.

"One terrible night, ah! more terrible than all the others! just seven months after the secret marriage of my sister, she was taken in labour! I had only time to run bare-footed to fetch a nurse, who was as secret and as trustworthy as a padlock; and I made her swear not to say anything. She came home with me as quickly as she could, and received the child into her arms; it was a boy. Heavens! what were we to do? No preparations had been made—all my plans were defeated! there was a child to conceal, to nourish, to swaddle; the publicity, the shame, the dishonour, the death or the destruction of Josette! Judge of my confusion, of my despair! I had no time for reflection. The nurse was fortunately as discreet as the tomb.

“‘What is to be done?’ I asked her.

“‘Miss Genevieve,’ she answered, ‘it is a great misfortune, but I have seen many as great, and, with silence and time, you get on better than with noise and bustle. You must have time enough to arrange means for saving your sister’s honour; you must inform the father, prepare his family, acknowledge the birth and legitimize it. To do this you will require some days: trust to me, give the baby to my care, we will mark it by some sign by which we shall always be able to recognize it, and I will take it to-night, in my apron, to the hospital for foundlings. I will ring the bell, a nurse will come, I will stand on one side, until I have seen the nurse take the child into the hospital, when it will be given into the charge of one of the wet-nurses who are always there to receive babies. No one but God and his stars will see me. It was St. Vincent de Paul who invented this,’ she continued, ‘for the purpose of blinding charity, concealing the shame of poor mothers, and saving the lives of thousands of children.’

LXVII.

“I had no choice, sir,” continued Genevieve; “so I murmured a prayer to that great saint, and I put a lock of his father’s hair with an S and a J on a piece of paper, and tied it round the arm of the child, who had not yet begun to cry. The good nurse took him in her apron, and I went back to attend to my sister, who was unaware of what we had done. By degrees I told her, carefully explaining the reasons of our conduct. She cried bitterly, poor thing! but she quite understood the necessity of this momentary separation from her child, when I had proved to her that she would certainly be able to recognize him, and that he would be as well taken care of by the charity of our merciful God, as he could have been at home.

“In three days she was able to get up again, sir; and people saw her, as usual, sitting at work by my side in the shop. I told her to sing and laugh whenever the neighbours passed; and nobody imagined that she had even had a headache. I heartily thanked God and the kind-hearted nurse.

LXVIII.

"Ah! sir, man never knows when to be glad and when to weep! Whilst I was inwardly rejoicing at the protection which Providence had granted us in our misfortune, I little suspected that a far greater evil than any we had yet endured was about to fall upon us. You would never be able to guess what it was, sir, I am sure."

I listened with redoubled attention.

"Well, sir," she went on, speaking in a lower tone, as if she had been telling me a secret which she was afraid some one else would hear, although we were alone together, "five long days and nights passed, and still the nurse did not come back to tell us what she had done with the child. Josette grew alarmed. I said, 'She is afraid of compromising us by coming to see us in the day-time, but why does she not come at night? The street is deserted, and no one passes through it when once the poor people have gone to bed; what, then, has happened—I must go and see her!' Accordingly, in the dusk of the evening, I put on my cloak and went out, all trembling, as though I had committed a crime, and without knowing whether I should dare to go inside the door of the old detached house in which the nurse resided.

"At the very moment that I turned the corner of the street that led to her house, I heard the murmuring of a crowd around her door, and presently I saw two gendarmes leading the poor woman, like a thief, between them.

LXIX.

"Oh! how agonized I felt when I saw that sight, sir; it seemed as though the skin had been torn off my face, and the raw flesh exposed to the rays of a burning sun. It was an inward feeling of shame that mounted into my face, and said to me, 'This is probably on your account: you will be discovered, and your sister dishonoured.' Oh, my God! my God! the presentiment was only too just. I was lost.

"I heard some one say to another, in the crowd that was following the nurse to prison, 'What has good Mother Belan been doing?' 'It is said that she has killed a child.' 'Oh, the monster!' exclaimed all the old women. 'No,' said

others, 'she has only sold some children to the gipsies for three shillings a-piece!' 'Pooh!' said a third, 'you know nothing about it. She is not capable of doing anything of the sort, she is such a good, kind-hearted soul; she has been taken to prison because she was caught by one of the commissary's spies, while she was taking a baby to the foundling hospital. It is said that the mother paid her for doing so, and that she will not tell where the child came from.' 'Oh, if that's all,' said the neighbours, 'she is quite right; perhaps the police would like her to go and proclaim on the house-tops all the secrets and misfortunes of the families she knows.'

"You will imagine in what distress I was, and how a cold sweat stood upon me, as, concealed in the recess of a doorway, I heard the conversation; and in what agony I returned home.

LXX.

"I was so very, very pale when I went in, that Josette remarked it.

"'You bring bad news, Genevieve,' she cried; 'some misfortune has happened. My poor child! my poor child! I will see him—I want to kiss him. I will get up, and go to Mother Bélan's; she shall tell me what she has done with him!'

"And while she was saying this, she had got up like a mad girl. She was putting on her cap and gown; she was going out in spite of all I could say—she was going to meet the crowd that was still lingering about the door of the nurse's house, and in the street. Her despair and her cries would have betrayed all: she would have been undone. I was obliged to throw myself before her, to struggle with all my strength against my sister, although I feared all the while that I might do her some harm, in order to put her to bed again, and to tell her all that I had just learned.

"'And the child, my child! the son of my Septime, what have they done with him—where is he? I will see him again! I will deliver him from the clutches of those monsters!'

"She cried out in this way, sir, so loud, while she was struggling with me, that I was obliged to put my hand

over her mouth, so that she might not be heard in the street.

" 'The child?' I said to her, 'he is not there; he has been sent out to a nurse far away from here. But calm yourself, we have put a mark upon him by which we shall always be able to recognise him.'

LXXI.

"But it was useless for me to reiterate to her that the child was well, that he was marked, that I had sent with him a bracelet made of her own and of his father's hair. She would hear no reason; she threw herself on her pillow, and kissed it and dandled it in her arms, as if it had been her son. She laughed, she cried, she behaved like one mad. All was over with her. This last shock had turned her milk, which was not yet exhausted, a fever seized her, and delirium augmented; before the day came she was dead! . . . yes, sir, dead in my arms, alone, cold, dead—quite dead.

"When the doctor came, he felt her pulse, and turned away. He said it was a scarlet fever, accompanied by delirium, and then he went away.

" 'There are some diseases,' he said to the people who were waiting outside in the shop, 'which leave no time for a remedy; when the physician arrives, the patient is dead.'

"As for me, sir, I said nothing. I stood there like a mother who has lost her only daughter; but I restrained myself, that I might at least save her honour, though I had not been able to save her life. I would not let any one besides myself watch by her bedside day and night; I laid her out with my own hands, and I placed her, after having kissed her forehead, in her coffin, which one of her cousins had made for her. I said to myself, as I was wrapping her in her shroud like a child in its swaddling-clothes, 'It was, then, for this, that I refused to marry Cyprien—it was to marry a corpse!'

"I was consoled, however, as much as it was possible for me to be by the interest which my relatives, my friends, and my neighbours manifested for me in my affliction. There was sorrow throughout all Voiron; people came in crowds to the door of the shop, and said, 'What a misfortune—what a pity! Such a beautiful girl—such a laborious and prudent girl; there will never be any one like her in the street

again. She was the rose of the country. God has taken her to himself! Poor Genevieve!

"When the morning of the second day was come, the bells tolled as if it had been the funeral of a real lady. The young girls of the town, both rich and poor, came dressed in white, to pin bouquets of white flowers upon the pall of her bier, and to accompany her coffin to the church and the cemetery. A handsome iron cross was set up over her grave, and covered all over with white ribbons and crowns of white violets, the symbol and honour of young girls who have died in their baptismal innocence. The cross resembled a vine-branch laden with grapes, or a dwarf apple-tree covered with blossoms upon all its branches. It is the custom of the country, sir, and when a young girl has not one of these crosses over her grave, it is not a good sign for her memory or for her family.

"I went there in the evening myself, when the night was falling, and I saw these flowers and these ribbons, and this made me cry even more than if there had been nothing there. I said to myself, 'This deceives men, but it does not deceive the angels. Poor child, thy tomb must keep thy secret—thy cross must be left to preserve the purity of thy name in Voiron.'

"Ah, how I wept—how I wept, all alone on that new-made grave, all alone in my bed, all alone in my shop for those three days!

LXXII.

"And then I had another weight pressing on my heart! It was like a reproach that never left me a moment's repose—it was a remorse that gnawed my heart whenever I needed sleep after my fits of crying.

"I said to myself, 'What right have you to be here at home, while poor Mother Bélan is in prison on your account? Have you the heart to let that poor woman suffer, and to jeopardise her honest reputation, whilst you know that she is innocent, and that she is in trouble only to screen others?'

"After three days I could hold out no longer. I dressed myself in my best clothes; without saying anything to anybody, I went to pray in the church and on my sister's grave,

and then I got into a vehicle that used to convey poor people to Lyons for a shilling—it was the same one that the nurse had been taken to prison in. I made every inquiry of the driver, and when I had got to Lyons, I gave a little boy a penny to show me the way to the door of the women's prison. I asked the porter to let me speak to the nurse from Voiron, saying that I had brought her news of her children, and a little clothing and money. The porter and his wife looked at me very sharply, and refused to let me in; but afterwards, when they saw me standing quite humbly at the door, and weeping bitterly, in the presence of the soldiers, they took pity on me, called me back, and, having led me into a little room by the side of their lodge, in which there were some chairs and an iron grating, they sent for the nurse, and left me with her as long as I wished.

"It made me very much ashamed to see her again, sir, as you may imagine, but above all to see her there on our account.

LXXIII

"She did not reproach me in the least, but told me that at the moment that she was taking the child to the hospital, she had been perceived by some spies, who were concealed close by; that these spies had denounced her to the commissary of police; that the commissary, according to the orders which he had received from head-quarters, had accused her as a woman who, from interested motives, conveyed foundlings to the hospital, to the prejudice of the department which was obliged to pay for their nurture; that the gendarmes had come to arrest her; that they had taken her to Grenoble to be interrogated, so that she might say whence the child came, and might designate its mother. That she had refused to do so, so as not to get us into trouble; that she would die rather than prove unworthy of the confidence which two unfortunate young girls had placed in her probity;—that thereupon the Judge had said to her, 'Well, you will remain in prison until you have told me where you got that child from;' and that she had been sent to Lyons to this house of correction, to remain there as long as it should please God, as a punishment for having exposed legitimate or illegitimate children, to make their support chargeable upon the State, and after-

wards to have them restored to their mothers, by means of marks fastened round their necks or their arms. 'But don't alarm yourself, Miss Genevieve,' added she, 'I can suffer, but I cannot betray. I would rather see my little children beg their bread from door to door—I would rather remain here until I was as old as these walls, and as dry as this wood, than denounce your sister. Poor little dear! tell her not to grieve.'

"Then I burst into tears, and told her of my sister's death.

"Well, then,' said she, 'she has nothing to fear up above; she is in heaven with God, who has pardoned many a worse sinner than she was!'

"Yes,' I said, 'but evil tongues here never pardon, either during their life or after their death, the name and memory of poor innocent girls who have been deceived into a false marriage, and led to commit an involuntary fault. The memory and the honour of my sister are more dear and more sacred to me now than they were during her life; swear to me, as you hope for salvation, that you will never tell to any living person, except your confessor, that Josette had sinned.'

"And she swore that she would not. Then I embraced her, and bade her farewell, promising her that she should be set at liberty the next day, and that I would come and take her place in prison. She understood me, and tried to make me abandon my design.

"What! Miss Genevieve,' said she, 'would you have the heart to take the misfortune upon yourself, and to make people believe that the fault is yours, just to set free a poor creature like me, and to prevent evil remarks being made over the grave of a dead person? But you surely do not know how cruel the world is, and that it will take you, during your whole life, for that which you are about to say that you are. Ah, Miss! don't do so; preserve your honour—do not ruin yourself!'

"I cannot help it, Mother Bélan,' said I, 'I must risk all. I cannot endure the idea of allowing you to be shut up within these four walls because you did us a service. I cannot endure the idea of hearing the name of my poor Josette, who is now an angel in heaven, uttered with a smile of contempt by

everybody in Voiron; of hearing people all the rest of my life, whenever they speak of her, whisper half-words that will make her poor dear soul blush in paradise; and then of seeing the parishioners, next Sunday, when they know the truth, snatch off as they pass by, the white ribbons, the virgin crowns, and the branches from her cross in the cemetery, and tread down under foot the nosegays of white flowers with which the young girls of her own age decorate her tomb on every saint's-day. Oh! no, no, never could I endure that, to see my sister despised in her coffin before my face, and her grave become a desolate place and a sign of contempt among the graves of young girls in the cemetery through which we pass every day when we go to church! It seems to me that her soul would never have rest in spite of all the masses that I could have said for her, and that her ghost would come every night to torment me with reproaches for having allowed her to be disgraced in her grave. No, no, never! I would rather take all the disgrace on myself, for I can endure suspicion and scorn for her sake, because I have within me a conscience void of offence.

"It was no use for her to argue and outreat, sir, my mind was made up; I am obstinate, that is my great fault, as the vicar used sometimes to tell me laughingly. I would not listen to her, and I left the prison with a lighter heart than when I entered it.

LXXIV

"The next day, at noon, I went to see the judge, and I was taken into his audience-room. He was a gentleman who looked at you with a severe and suspicious expression of countenance. For a moment I was unable to speak to him. He was writing.

"'What do you want with me, my girl?' said he, in a rough voice, raising his head.

"'Please your worship,' I replied, stuttering and trembling in spite of myself, just like a person who had committed a crime, 'there is in your prison a woman from Voiron called Mother Bélan. She is the midwife of our quarter, and every one loves and esteems her. She is accused of having carried a legitimate child to the hospital, to spare the expense of his support to a married father and mother, who were desirous

thus to rob charity. She has been told that she would be kept in prison until she informed you where the baby came from.'

" 'Well,' said he, rising, and looking at me with a sadder frown than before.

" 'Well, sir, since I must tell you, the child has no legitimate father and mother, the midwife is innocent, she is punished for another's fault. The child was taken'—

" 'From whose house?' interrupted he.

" 'From my house,' answered I, in a very low voice, bowing down my head, and blushing deeply.

" 'So young,' said he, after a moment's silence, 'and already an unnatural mother! What! you were barbarous enough to expose your child to avoid a moment of just shame, and to violate nature, rather than endure the reproaches of your friends!'

"And a great deal more he said; indeed, he preached me as long and as threatening a sermon as a minister ever did, from the pulpit, when speaking to sinners, in the name of the justice of God.

"I made no answer, but kept my eyes fixed on the ground. Although I felt myself humiliated to my very fingers' ends, I was inwardly happy to see that he really believed me to be guilty, and was so very angry with me.

"He asked me what were my occupation, my income, and my means of existence. I made myself out to be neither richer nor poorer than I was.

" 'Will you take your child back, if it can be found?' added he.

" 'Oh! sir,' said I, throwing myself on my knees before him, 'I ask for nothing more. In the name of heaven, restore him to me. I marked him with a lock of hair. Now that all is discovered, and I have no more shame to endure, I will pay, out of my earnings, the wages of the nurse, and I will bring him up as if he were my son. . . .

" 'I saw I was betraying myself, so I hastened to add: . .

" 'As if he were my legitimate son.'

" 'Well,' said he, in a milder tone, 'you don't seem to be an evilly-disposed girl; I will write to Grenoble, and your child shall be searched for, and restored to you; and you must pay the expenses. Meanwhile, I shall direct the midwife to be set at liberty, and you shall take her place in

prison for a few days. Your repentance and confession will have some effect in shortening your imprisonment.'

'He began to write again. Presently he rang a little bell that stood upon his table, and a dark-complexioned man, with a silver chain upon his waistcoat, came in.

'“ ‘Sergeant,’ said he, ‘take this girl to prison; here is her commitment. And here is an order for the liberation of the midwife from Voiron.’

“The dark man took the two papers, made me get into a carriage that was standing in the street, and conducted me to the prison.

“The poor nurse, sir, wept more at leaving than I did on entering the prison. She had more pity for me than for her self.

LXXV.

“I remained nearly six weeks in prison. At first I was put into the same sleeping-room and yard with a horde of bad women and guls, whom it horrified me to see and to hear. Ah, sir, the dung-heap is a cleaner place than that prison-yard was! it pains my heart only to think of it.

“‘What did you do to get here?’ they used to ask one-another. ‘Me, I stole something!’—‘Me, I got hold of some children, and made them pale with hunger, and shivering with cold, and tortured them under their clothes to make them cry out, and get alms from compassionate people.’—‘Me, I did this!’—‘Me, I did that!’—‘Me, I’d do a great deal more if I were out again.’

“All tried to surpass each other in their boasts of their vices, libertinage, and crime. Each narrative was followed by bursts of laughter that must have made the angels weep.

“‘And you, what have you done to deserve to be in our company?’ they asked me.—‘Me! I have done nothing, thank God.’—‘Oh! you’re a simpleton or a hypocrite!’ they said, pointing at me with their fingers. ‘Go along with you, you’re as bad as any one of us, although you do look so sanctified; or at least, if you are as innocent as you say, we’ll soon sharpen your wits.’

“I used to cry with shame, sir, and to sit down by myself on the steps that led from the yard into the cloisters, by the wall of the chapel, praying to God in my heart, but with-

out moving my lips, for fear of leading them to attack me afresh. Ah! what wickedness there is, sir, in those largo towns! All the filth does not run into the sewers!

"When the porter and his wife saw this, after the lapse of two or three days, that good woman having need of some one to help her to draw water, to sweep the rooms, and to make the beds, kept me with her during the day, and let me sleep at night in a garret above her own room. Ah! how glad I was at this, and how willingly I did my work! I was used to service, so it cost me no trouble. I used also to take care of her little children, for they made me think of my sister's son. This good woman took such a liking to me, that she said:

" 'When you are liberated, if you like to stay with me, I will give you good wages.'

" 'I won't decline your offer absolutely,' I replied; 'but I don't know what may happen.'

LXXVI.

"After I had spent six weeks in prison,—a prison made endurable by the humanity of the gaoler's wife, the judge sent for me into his audience-room, whither I was conducted by the same dark man who had taken me into custody at first.

" 'You are free,' the judge said to me, in a severe tone, 'go where you will, but do not fall again into your former evil courses. The law will be inflexibly rigorous against these exposures.'

"I still remained in the room.

" 'What are you waiting for?' he said, with an impatient gesture.

" 'And the child, sir?' I asked him, timidly, for I thought it would be restored to me.

" 'Your child, unhappy woman!' he cried, in an angry tone; 'do you think we would restore your child to you, if we had it, so that all guilty and unnatural mothers like you might give themselves the pleasure of seeing the fruits of their vices brought up at the expense of the country, for them to claim afterwards, when they had grown up strong and healthy children. No, no, the law must at any price pre-

vent such abuses, or the departments would be soon ruined. Besides,' he added, 'discussion is useless in the present case, your child can't be found. On receiving them into the hospitals of Grenoble, the nuns have strict orders to take from them any marks of recognition that might be attached either to their neck or their arms.'

" 'Ah! is it possible?' I cried, lifting my two hands towards him in a supplicating attitude, 'the lock of hair has been taken from him! the child is lost! Oh, my God, my God, what have I done?'

" And I burst into tears.

" My gesture, my despair, my tears, and my cries, only served to confirm the judge in the conviction that I was really the mother.

" 'Yes,' he said, 'lost! lost for ever! and this is your punishment. Those who expose their children, do not deserve to have them restored to them. Go now, and try to live honestly in future; and remember the police will have their eyes upon you.'

" I went out like an unfortunate criminal, whom the police have just released from imprisonment, whom the passers-by regard with disgust as she leaves the justice-room, and whose shame follows her into the streets.

LXXVII.

" I mechanically took the road that led to the place at which I had got down from the carriage when I came from Voiron. I paid my fare, put my bundle under my arm, and took my seat outside the same vehicle, which was just going to start. The driver, who had been polite to me on my journey thither, scowled at me now I was going back. He kept speaking in a low voice, during the whole of the time, to the country people, who were sitting near him. No one spoke to me, but all looked at me with an air of contempt and disgust. Two or three times I heard my name mentioned, followed by bursts of laughter, and expressions of scorn and loathing.

" 'She has just come from an inn, where she got her board and lodging gratis,' said the driver: 'ask her if the table was as good as the bed.'

“ ‘They won’t take in children two months’ old,’ said another, with a sneer.

“ ‘What a hypocrite she is!’ said an old woman, ‘anybody to look at her would think she was as pious as a saint.’

“ And then they laughed, laughed all around me, just as though they had been talking of some one who was not present. But, sir, I well understood their malice; I hung down my head; and pretended to knit, but I only got into disorder, my confusion blinded my eyes and deprived my fingers of their usual skill. I could have wished to be shut up in an under-ground dungeon for all the rest of my life: for walls are less cold, less harsh, and less offensive than men. I said to myself? ‘What will become of you when you get into the streets of Voiron? The children will follow you as though you were a puppet-show! You won’t even dare to go in the day time and pray to God on your sister’s grave on behalf of her poor little child!’ Oh! how long that day was! I was afraid to hear myself breathe!

LXXVIII.

“ Fortunately for us there is a Providence, sir; the carriage broke down a few miles from Voiron, and we were all obliged to walk the rest of the way. Night fell; I slipped along through the back streets of the town till I came to my own door. I went in,—no one saw me; I had a piece of bread in my pocket. Oh, how I wished that day would never dawn again!”

“ But, my poor Geneviève,” said I, interrupting her, “this was folly; you might have held your head up boldly before both men and women.”

“ That is true, sir; but I had so thoroughly taken the misfortune and the shame to myself, that it seemed to me that I was really guilty of all that others might think about me.”

“ And what did you do the next day?”

LXXIX.

“ The next day, sir, I did not dare to open the shutters of my shop, for fear that the neighbours and passers-by would

come and look at me through the windows. I remained all day in the darkness, praying to God, and thinking of Josette. When the night had come, I tremblingly opened the door, and went to buy some food.

"'Oh! so you've got out of prison!' said the shopkeeper to me.

"'Yes,' I answered, humbly.

"I saw that everybody knew where I had just come from, and believed the charge against me. People looked at me with repugnance, but not, however, offensively; they pitied me with their eyes. I went to the cemetery, and sat down on my sister's grave, which was still adorned by the flowers that had been put there fresh on the preceding Sunday. I prayed there, and ate my bread there in tears.

LXXX.

"After that I returned home; and the next day, seeing that there were only a few pence left in the drawer, I said to myself, 'You must earn your living; at your age you cannot beg. Come, cost what it may, you must re-open your shop, try to obtain employment, and work and sell that you may live!'

"I had the courage to open my shop, sir, to display my little stock of merchandize, to sit behind the counter as usual, and to endure the looks, the smiles, and the whisperings of the passers-by, just as though nothing had happened; but no one came in, sir, except one or two beggars to ask for alms. I heard malicious tongues saying in the street—'What impudence she has! Ah, if poor, pretty little Josette had lived, how humiliated she would have been at the disgrace of her oldest sister! She was pretty, at least! It was merciful of God to take her to himself!'

"And then, there was in the street opposite, a bad woman, who, seeing that I was away, and believing that I had been sent out of the country, or imprisoned for a long while, had hastened to take my place, had opened a shop for the sale of the same kind of goods as mine, had drawn away all my customers, and was continually pointing her finger at me, and saying: 'Who would dare now to buy even a penny-worth of soap in such a shop? It would soil your hands instead of cleansing them!'

"Oh, heaven! how I suffered during that unhappy week! My half-sisters and my cousins were the first to cast me off, and never again set foot within my house.

LXXXI.

"I soon found, sir, that no customers would buy of me. The mothers, when they sent their daughters out to purchase anything, used to say: 'You must not buy it of Genevieve.' Neither would any one bring me any work to do; and I did not dare to go and ask for employment, for I should have been told, 'We have none to give you.' Ah, sir! talk about the plague; shame is even worse than the plague to a poor girl. If my mother had not brought me up in the fear of God I don't know what I should have done; but I speak the truth when I say that I never once thought about taking to evil courses; I would have died rather than commit a crime.

LXXXII.

"But this was not all, sir. Unfortunately I had bought, during the preceding spring, fifty crowns' worth of merchandise on credit of the wholesale dealers in the high street, intending to pay them in autumn, after the season was over. As I had no customers now, I could not pay my merchants; neither could I return to them their goods, for during the two months that I had been in prison and my shop had been shut up, the cat, finding that there was nothing left for her to eat under the counter, had run away, and you may imagine what fine work the rats had made in her absence. As for the woollens, it was a sad sight to look at them, sir; there were great holes gnawed through the pieces of cloth. The salt had melted, and the soap become mouldy; the gingerbread was as full of tooth-marks as a saw; the lace was like lint, and the mirrors lay broken on the stone floor. No one would have taken their goods back; but every one came to ask me to pay them what I owed them: It was said: 'She will decamp some fine morning, so we must get what we can out of her.' The whole of my rent was not paid; and the landlord would not renew my tenure, because my shop gave, he said, a bad repute to his house. At last, sir, he and the wholesale merchants agreed to sell my things by auction.

"Yes, sir, I saw all my property sold off before my door, on the pavement of the street. A man, standing on the bench from which Cyprien had taken me so joyously into his arms to seat me on his mule, unfolded pieces of cloth, handkerchiefs, ribbons, and even my dresses and the dresses and stomachers of poor Josette, crying out: 'Only threepence—fourpence—sixpence; who'll buy? Here is Miss Josette's apron!—Here is Miss Genevieve's Sunday gown!—What'll you bid?' And great roars of laughter resounded through the crowd into the room behind the shop where I was concealed, sitting on the palliasso of my bed while the mattresses were being sold at the door.

"And no one came to console me, sir, not even the auctioneer, who was continually coming in and brutally taking away, from under my very eyes, sometimes one thing, and sometimes another, to put them up for sale, and who, I really believe, would, for diversion, have put me up for sale, so excited was he by the tumult and by wine; and I almost think I should have made no resistance, I was so much overcome, and my strength had so entirely failed me.

"During the evening, the nurse came to see me, and said to me, reproachfully:

"'Is it possible, Miss Genevieve, that you are content to endure all the affronts that are unjustly heaped upon you, and that you will not release me from the oath I made to you?'

"'No Mother Bélan,' I said, 'I will never release you from it at any price.'

"'And why are you so obstinate?' she asked.

"'Because,' said I, 'the living can endure, but the dead cannot defend themselves.'

"'And what do you intend to do now?' said the poor woman, folding her hands over her apron.

"'As soon as it is night, I intend to go and ask shelter of my half sister.'

"She tossed her head and went away, but soon she returned, and said to me:

"'When you come to be in want of bread, Miss Genevieve, remember that you will always be welcome to my house.'

LXXXIII.

"As soon as the streets became as deserted and empty

as my shop, and it was quite right, I went and knocked at the door of my half-sister, the only one who remained, for the other had left Voiron. She was not unkind; but I have already told you that these two daughters of my father by his first wife, had always looked down upon us, because they had a little fortune on their mother's side, whilst we inherited nothing from our mother. They did not look with much affection upon their poor relations, and since their marriage we had seen very little of them.

"She, however, received me kindly, gave me plenty to eat and drink, and even had a bed made up for me in the garret, by the side of the servant's bed.

"'But we have children, young girls who will soon be marriageable,' said she, reasoning with me in a very friendly manner; 'you know what is said about you in the country. That has nothing to do with me, I don't believe it, for I think you are a very honest girl.' Nevertheless, if my daughters were seen in the company of their bad aunt, what would not people say? And then you have been unfortunate in business, and obliged to have your things sold by auction. This is injurious to credit; my husband is in business, and your being here might go against him, you know. It will never do for you to remain with us; you shall stay here for a few days, but it must not be known in the town. When the week is over you must leave us, and try to get into service at some place a little distance away. We will give you money enough to pay your travelling expenses.'

"I understood her reasoning, and I could not blame her, sir; for every one thinks first of their own children: it was painful, but still it was nothing but natural. I thanked her, took my supper with the rest of the family that evening, and went to sleep with the servant, after I had helped her to fasten up the house and wash the dishes.

LXXXIV.

"I did not feel any difficulty about going into service in any family, on the contrary, I was made for it, and it pleased me to render any one assistance, even though I was not paid for it. I was not fond of fine clothes, and I was not afraid of hard work, as you know. But what person at Voiron, knew-

ing the stories that were told about me, would give me a situation; and who would take me without a character at any other place? A poor girl who has been unfortunate, who sent her child to the foundling-hospital, and who has been confined for two months in jail at Lyons,—that was no great recommendation, was it, sir? No. Well, then, there was only one person in all Voiron who could conscientiously give me a good character, and her reputation had been somewhat damaged by the share she had taken in my affair, and I was the only person who could clear her; this was Mother Bélan, the midwife. Here was an instance of the chances of human affairs. We were both of us suspected, and we alone could certify to each other's morality and innocence. Truly life is a badly disentangled skein of thread!"

This reflection made me smile, though I was really much grieved at the singular embarrassment of this poor girl.

LXXXV.

" 'Well!' said I in the morning when I woke, 'my course is clear, I must go to Mother Bélan.' And I went to her house before there were any persons out in the streets.

"The good woman gave me a certificate to the effect that my name was Genevieve, that I was a trustworthy and honest girl, that I had never done any one in the country an injury, and that I might be trusted by any one and every one, to attend to the kitchen, to keep the house in order, or to take care of the children; and she signed it. It was not very well written, nor on very clean paper; but she wrote it with a kind heart; and when she had done, she went to her drawers and forced me to accept twelve shillings that she had there, and one of her best neckerchiefs, so that I might present a decent appearance when I went to a house. 'You will repay me this out of your savings, Miss Genevieve,' she said. 'I owe it her still, sir; but she also said, 'If you can't pay me here, why then you must repay me in heaven!'

LXXXVI.

"My sister also gave me some clothes and a little money, and I started to seek a situation at Grenoble. Mother

Bélan had recommended me to one of her friends there who exercised the same profession as she did. I served there without wages for a few weeks ; but the sight of women in labour, and the cries of the little children in the house, continually recalled so very forcibly to my memory my poor sister, and the origin of our misfortunes, that I could not accustom myself to it. I was soon obliged to leave her, for I did nothing but weep, and I was always ill. A poor woman, the widow of a grocer, who had a pretty daughter sixteen years of age, then took me to do the cooking and make the beds, and to teach her daughter how to make lace. I was to have ten crowns a-year for my wages, and twelve yards of cloth and two aprons on New Year's Day. The mother was kind, but rather suspicious ; she used to go to market with me herself, to see whether I bargained well, and to make sure that I did not pocket a single apple or plum for myself out of the provision basket. This humiliated me very much, for I had always been trusted most implicitly.

" But the daughter was so pretty, so kind-hearted, so affable, so good-natured, that she made up for all her mother's faults. As soon as I had done my work in the kitchen, and that never took me very long, she and I used to sit together working in the parlour, with our feet upon a foot-warmer, during the whole day, while her mother was out chatting with her old acquaintances. At the end of three months we were like sisters. She reminded me of Josette, sir ; and I was very happy, so happy that I would have stayed there the whole of my life.

" But just at the very time when we had become most fond of one another, and she had promised to take me with her whenever she got married, so that we might never be separated, a travelling pedlar from Voiron, whom I did not even know by sight, but who knew me, came into the house, with his pack upon his back, to sell some linen to my mistress. I was sent down to the cellar to fetch some wine to give to the man after he had been paid, for he had bargained that something to eat and drink should be given him in addition to the price of his goods. Oh ! the wicked man ! I do not wish him any evil, though ; but he might

have kept his tongue within his teeth, and not have ruined a poor girl like me, just for the pleasure of talking.

"When I came up from the cellar, with a jug of wine in my hand, I heard this man speaking in a low tone to the two ladies; they left off when I entered, but I saw an extraordinary and suspicious expression on the countenances of both mother and daughter. The mother looked angry, the daughter sorrowful. They no longer spoke to me in the same tone of voice; they did not look at me with the same friendly eye; they did not tell me as usual to bring my work into the parlour in the evening. I passed a night of anxiety, wondering what I could have done to displease them. The next morning my mistress came into the kitchen and said:—

"Here are your wages. You are very bold to dare to set your foot in an honest house, after what the pedlar told us about you. Make up your bundle in my presence, so that I may be sure that you take nothing that does not belong to you, and leave my house!"

"Alas! my bundle, sir, was not very large, I could tie all my things up in one pocket-handkerchief. I did not venture to answer her; and I went back into my bed-room to put on my shoes. The daughter came secretly to bid me farewell; she wept at leaving me, and slipped a crown-piece into the pocket of my apron. I went from door to door over all the town to try and get a place, but every one asked me, 'Where do you come from? Are you known here? Have you a good character from your last mistress? We will make inquiries about you.' When I called again in the evening, or on the next day, I was told, 'We have engaged some one else.' I went away wiping my eyes with the corner of my apron."

"At last, the wife of my late mistress's shoemaker consented to engage me to take care of her children, and to bind shoes in the room behind the shop. I had my bed and board, and twopence for every pair of shoes that I bound. Well! sir, I was satisfied, because the shoemaker and his wife did not despise me, and used to say to me sometimes, 'All have their faults, but that is no reason why we should scorn one another. The children are well taken care of, the

shoes are well bound; there are never any high words in the shop; remain with us as long as you please, we are not ashamed of you!

"Yes, it is true, they were not ashamed of me; but would you believe that others found fault with them for their charity towards me? Yes, sir, my former mistress began by withdrawing her own and her daughter's custom from them, and afterwards induced her friends to do the same, saying: 'Those people are very insolent, and very indelicate to take into their service a vagabond who deceived the confidence of an honest family like ours, by never saying that she had just been liberated from prison, where she had been confined for the most frightful crimes. Indeed, I am told she not only tried to lose but also to kill her poor child!' When I found this out, sir, and saw that the shoemaker's charity to me was the cause of all the evil, and that work and food were getting scarcer on my account, I said to myself, 'You must not bring misfortune upon these poor people.' So I bade good-bye to the shoemaker and his wife, kissed the children, and set out one evening, so that nobody might see me leave the town. The shoemaker's wife gave me a letter to the wife of a citizen of Lyons, in whose service she had been when young. She said that I was careful, and orderly, and that she had no fault to find with the way in which I did my work. She begged her to help me, if by chance she or any of her friends stood in need of a servant.

LXXXVII.

"This letter was of great use to me, sir; for the day after I arrived at Lyons, the daughter of the lady to whom it was addressed, who had just married a manufacturer at Tarare, took me into her service, and I went with her to their country-house in the environs of that town. It made my heart inexpressibly glad again to behold mountains, hedgerows, and meadows, and to see the weavers at work, and the linen spread out on the grass, just as it had been in my mother's field at Voiron. I remained for three years in that house, very quiet and tolerably happy. I had no fault to find with my master, except that like nearly all other merchants, he was rather avaricious. They were, however,

very well off ; but you might have said that their purse was dropsical, for the larger it swelled the more desirous it was to drink. They liked me very well, because I required very little wages, had a poor appetite, and was willing to do any kind of work ; so that I did the cooking, dressed the lady and her two children, dug in the garden, washed the clothes, and took care of my master's horse, for he had a horse to draw the carriage in which he used to go about to sell his linen. The poor animal ! they begrudged him his food, too ! If I had not secretly carried to him the outside leaves of the vegetables, and other things from the kitchen, he would often have had nothing but his rack to eat. But I took a liking to the poor beast. He used to neigh in his stable whenever he heard my voice or my footstep in the yard, and when I opened the stable-door, he looked at me as fondly as a human being could have done. It was, however, from my master's aversion as regarded his animals, and the pity that I felt for them, that my last misfortune, and subsequent happiness were brought about. I will tell you all about it, though I'm sure you will laugh. But never mind, it is all true ; the heart leads us to commit many follies.

LXXXVIII.

" There were in the stable along with my pet horse, two or three sheep, that used to graze in the meadows during the day, when the linen was not spread out to bleach. My master and mistress were unwilling to lose even the few blades of half rotten grass that sprang up underneath the damp cloths. At the beginning of winter, after these sheep had been shorn, they were sold with their lambs to the butcher, so that their owners might not have the expense of feeding them during the cold weather.

" One of these sheep yeanned at Martinmas, that is, on the 11th of November, and eight days after she was sold to be killed ; but her lamb was too young for sale, so it remained with me. I gave it milk from the cow in the hollow of my hand, and brought it up just as I would have brought up a motherless child. The poor little animal became quite attached to me, sir. When it could not follow me to the stable, the court-yard, or the garden, it used to bleat most

piteously; so that, to keep it quiet, I was obliged to let it come with me into the kitchen, where it lay down with the dog, by the fire-side. It was never happy unless it was with me or the dog. The dog had also grown so fond of it, that he would bark in his kennel until I took the lamb to him. He made room for it on the straw, and there these two animals used to play or sleep together in a way that it gave me pleasure and compassion to behold.

"Shall I confess it, sir? When my fire was smouldering beneath the ashes, and my master and mistress were out, I used often to go and sit down by the kennel in the sunshine, and watch those two animals, while I was knitting my stockings or hemming my napkins. I was so foolish, sir, that I used to feel thoroughly happy there with two animals which I was sure loved me. I felt their warm breath as they put their heads over my shoulder. Indeed, sir, though it is said that animals have no souls, I really used sometimes to fancy, when I looked into their eyes, that I could see as much thought and intellect in them as in the eyes of a human being. At all events, sir, be that as it may, the dog and the lamb were my society, my family, my chief consolation. How could it be otherwise? We love those who love us!

LXXXIX.

"Ah! but," said Genevieve, checking herself, "I have not told you anything about the dog yet!"

"True," I replied, "please tell me all about him, for you know I am very fond of dogs."

"Well, sir, he was" not a citizen-dog like yours, for you know that dogs, like men, belong to different ranks; there are beggar-dogs, labourer-dogs, citizen-dogs, and nobleman-dogs; you tell them by their hide, as you tell men by their dress. Why? I don't know, it is a mystery, but it is nevertheless so."

"This proves to me, Genevieve, that you have been a careful observer of animals. Nature has fitted them for different professions. Food and lodging cannot alter them, they are what they are. Sometimes you see a noble dog belonging to a peasant, and a peasant dog belonging to a noble. But they can't deceive one another; they recognize

each other for what they really are, and they do this the more easily, because they have no clothes in which to disguise themselves. They are proud or humble according to their rank ; they envy or respect one another just as men do. All nature is made of the same materials. But tell me what kind of dog yours was."

"My dog was neither large, nor small, nor fat, nor lean ; his name was *Loulou*, because he was a wolf-dog ; his muzzle was rather pointed, his eye gray and keen, his teeth short and white, his lips smiling, his bark gentle and rather plaintive when he was chained up, and his ears were small, sharp, and continually pricked up, and he used to turn them from right to left, like the sails of a windmill, to catch the sound. His tail, as bushy as that of a fox, was turned up at the end, but curved at the middle by the weight of his long, thick, silky hair. His hair was long, fine, and as soft to the touch as well-combed flax ; and it was so bushy that when I patted him my hand was quite covered over by it, and when I took it away the marks of my fingers remained, just as footmarks remain in a meadow when the grass is high. He was of a sort between a peasant-dog and a citizen-dog, something like the vicar's dog that is lying on the chair there. "

XC.

"Though the house was very large, sir, my mistress very parsimonious, my master very ill-tempered, my wages small, and my work hard, the dog and the lamb kept me company during the day-time in the stable or the courtyard, and during the evening in the kitchen. Their society attached me to the house. It seemed to me that we were related to one another, and that if I were to leave my master's service, they would be left without anybody who could understand them, and I should remain without anybody to talk to or to love in the world. They seemed to belong to me, much more than to my master, by the right of habit and of mutual attachment ; however, I would not have stolen them on any account, for they were not kept at my expense, but at that of the house. So, though I was not happy there, I never thought about leaving. The idea of bidding farewell for ever to the dog and the lamb never once

entered my mind. Without them life would have been a desert to me.

"The lamb used to sleep with the dog at the foot of my bed. It gave me so much pleasure, sir, to see of a morning when I awoke, their four eyes looking friendly at me! And then, when I had got up, the dog went to his duty at the gate of the court-yard, or into his kennel, and the lamb, following me from the kitchen to the stable, from the stable to the wood-stack, and from the wood-stack to the garret, whither I went to spread out the linen, came after me up and down the stairs, and never willingly left me.

"They did not so much begrudge the dog his food, because he kept watch over the linen, and ate up the leavings; but the lamb was a source of great grief to my master and mistress, because it ate hay, bread, and grass. I used often to hear complaints against it; sometimes it had devoured a salad, sometimes eaten a little salt, sometimes gnawed a crust of bread. My mistress said: 'We must shear it and sell it at Martinmas; we cannot afford to keep an animal that gets fat at our expense and yields us no return.' Oh! the economy of those people had neither consideration nor pity, neither eyes nor ears, neither *if* nor *but*; everything must yield them some return. When once the poor animal had given them its wool, it had nothing else to give but its tenderness and affection for me; and that was not thought of for a moment.

XCI.

"'Well!' said I one day to my mistress, 'since the keep of the lamb distresses you so much, I will pay for its food, if you will allow me, out of my wages. Take ten out of the thirty shillings that you give me a-year, and say no more about it. You shall have the wool, and I shall have the friendship; and we shall both be satisfied.' My master and mistress calculated upon their fingers, and then laughed and said: 'Very well.' For the future I had only twenty shillings a-year, and the lamb was allowed to remain along with me and the dog. All went on well until the next Martinmas drew nigh.

"But, unfortunately, one evening, when I had gone out to milk the cow, and had left the pail of milk at the stable door

while I went to litter down the horse, this greedy lamb, sir, saw the milk all foaming before him, dipped his head into the pail, and began to drink. He did not drink a quarter of a pint, sir, at most; but suddenly my mistress opened the window opposite, and began to shriek as though she were being murdered. I ran up, drove away the lamb, and tried to make excuses for the poor creature by saying that it was my fault for having left the milk within his reach; but it was no use. From that time forth the lamb and I were regarded with suspicion, and watched as though we had been two thieves; our bread was measured out to us, and I was obliged to give a strict account of the refuse vegetables. It was said that I gave to the lamb the salad leaves that were intended for the cow; in fact, I now had no peace! I sometimes used to weep about it, caressing the poor creature! it seemed to understand me, and looked up in my face with a sorrowful expression, as it lay with its head in my apron, and its pretty, gentle eyes fixed on mine.

XCII.

"Martinmas was now at hand. My master and mistress were continually saying that I neglected their interests to look after the animals, that I was too fond of them, and that I made too great pets of the dog and the lamb; that the dog should be chained up all the day, and the lamb sold at one of the country fairs, or else they would not get a purchaser for it, or would lose by the sale. I offered to buy it for myself, and to give a whole year's wages for my poor friend. But they said that would be a bad bargain, because I let it do so much mischief in the garden and in the kitchen. Then they made a conspiracy against me. It makes me shudder to tell you about it.

XCIII.

"One Saturday evening, sir, after I had done my work and was sitting down quietly in my bed-room mending my stockings, while the dog and the lamb were playing together in the kennel below, and suspecting no evil, I heard a great noise under my window: people were running, the lamb was

bleating, and the dog barking and grinding his teeth. I dropped my work, opened my window, and what do you think I saw? I saw a man, with bare arms, a blue apron round his waist, and a great knife in his right hand, trying with his left hand to drag the lamb out of the kennel of the dog, who was defending his friend with his teeth as well as his voice! I cried out to stop the butcher, but he did not take any notice of me; and enraged at having been bitten by the dog, he plunged his knife into the lamb's throat, under my very eyes, and in spite of all my cries and gestures. Ah! sir, it seemed to me that I was witnessing a crime, and that he was murdering a Christian.

"However, the man having been knocked down, and having left the knife in the throat of the poor animal, the dog and the lamb had jumped over his body and run instinctively into the kitchen, the door of which stood wide open, to come and take refuge with me. They both ran up the wooden staircase, the one yelping, the other groaning, and lay down under the bed, at my feet, as if to save themselves from their assassin. Poor creatures! You should have seen how piteously they looked at me, and how they seemed to implore my protection. I threw myself down by the bedside to take the knife out of the lamb's throat; it stretched its head towards me, and let me do so, as if it knew that I wished to relieve it and not to destroy it. But no sooner had I removed the knife, than the blood gushed out in torrents over my hands, and the lamb expired in my arms! The dog trembled with grief, as though he were shuddering at the murder of his companion, and had as great a horror of blood and death as myself! I wept also, with the dead lamb in my lap, and the dog howling at my feet, mingling my cries with his, and my tears with the blood of the lamb. Ah! sir, I had never seen a crime committed before, but this one made me understand all others, and will never be effaced from my memory.

"I did not reproach my master and mistress. I said: 'They are masters of what belongs to them; the carcass of the animal is theirs, but his friendship was mine. Why did they deprive me of it treasonably? I shall go away.' I embraced the dog; I was sorry to leave him in so hard a place, but I could remain there no longer, first, because I

should have always had that scene of horror, of murder and of blood before my eyes when I was in that room; and secondly, because the assassination of my poor companion had had such an effect upon me, that I should not have been able to attend to the cooking any longer, as the sight of a piece of raw meat would have made me faint. I therefore determined to leave my situation. I took my three years' wages, and my bundle under my arm, and I left Tarara, without knowing whither I should go. I could no longer offer myself as a servant of all work to any family, because of my repugnance to do the cooking. I said to myself: 'I will return to Dauphiny, and try to gain my living as a needle-woman somewhere in the neighbourhood of Voiron. Perhaps the people there will have forgotten the fault imputed to me, and some good woman will engage me to attend to her children, to take care of her silkworms, or to stretch out and bleach linen.'

XCIV.

"After I had paid my expenses, all I had left out of my three years' wages was a dozen crowns and a few clothes. An egg-merchant, whom I knew, was going to take a load of chesnuts to Lyons for sale; and he agreed to let me ride with him in his cart for a shilling. I got so saturated with the snow, and so benumbed with the cold, that, on my arrival at Lyons, I was obliged to go to the hospital. The Sisters of Charity received me kindly, and took great care of me. I made friends of two of them, who acted as nurses in the women's ward. It seemed to me so good and so noble thus to do everybody service, whether you knew them or not, whether they were repugnant or otherwise, without asking for any recompense from them, but on the contrary, obeying their slightest wishes for a reward that would be given only by the Master of us all in Paradise! Oh! how I envied them! I asked them if I could not become one of them, as I was a servant also. They said yes, but that I must have good recommendations and a small dowry, and that I must enter a convent from which I should by-and-bye be sent to serve as they did in the hospital. Recommendations? I could not get any good ones. A convent? I should have been

asked: 'Whence do you come, and what do you bring?' A dowry? I had only about thirty shillings, and a few clothes.

"But, I mistake, Sir; I thought I had that sum, but I had not. A wicked woman who was recovering from her illness, and who slept in the bed next to mine, seeing that I frequently looked at my bundle as it lay on the chair beside me, said to me: 'Be careful; you don't know whom you may sleep by in these inns of the good God. I don't know whether you have got a purse, but, if you have, conceal it carefully.' I believed, sir, that she told me to do this out of kindness, but it was with an evil intention; she only wanted to know whether I had any money. I took out of my bundle the stocking in which I had put my thirty shillings, and hid it under my pillow before her eyes; but my fever soon became so violent, that I forgot all about my little property.

"This woman left the hospital while I was ill, and when I left it myself, I had nothing! She had robbed me during my fever. I had only two sixpences in the pocket of my apron! How could I venture now to return to my country after an absence of several years, and thus to insult my family? I could not think of doing so; I bought some bread, asked my way of the people I met, and walked on slowly through the villages, towards Cremieux, Bourgoing, and Tour-du-Pin. Everywhere I offered my services, and everywhere I was refused. I lived for about fifteen days on the high-roads, selling all my poor effects one by one to pay for my bed and food at the inns at which I stopped. It was the bad season of the year; there were no silk-worms to take care of, nor hay to turn, nor silk to wind, nor corn to reap, nor any work for a poor girl like me in the country. It was no use for me to wander about from door to door; I was told: 'We have no work for you to do;' or else, 'You have no references;' or else, 'That girl has a sickly appearance, she would be always ill, we cannot take her, as we have enough to do to keep our own old folks and children.' The roads were covered with ice and snow.

XCV.

"At length, sir, I had nothing left but the clothes that I wore upon my body, and they were all in tatters. My shoes were full of holes, and my stockings out at heel; I looked like one of those vagabonds who have gone into a prison or a hospital in their summer-clothes, and who come out again in the month of December with a cotton gown, a light straw bonnet, and thin shoes fit only for walking upon the grass or the dust. When I saw myself in the glass of the shop-windows, I could not help fearing and pitying myself. I said: 'Who would ever let such a beggar sit down by their fire-side?'

"Alas! sir, I was soon obliged to become a beggar. Yes, sir, I do not blush to tell you, I have held out my hand for charity. I did not do so for long, but I have held out my hand."

"Poor Genevieve!" I exclaimed. "What! you were reduced to the necessity of knocking at persons' doors, and begging food and shelter for the night, for charity? Ah! you have well repaid it since."

XCVI.

"Yes, sir," she continued, raising her head more proudly than she had hitherto done, "I resolved to ask for charity, rather than to return to Voiron and disgrace my elder sister and my rich nephews and nieces. I preferred to feel shame for myself, than to bring shame on all the rest of my family. Accordingly, when I had nothing left, and had given up all hopes of obtaining a situation, I kept away from the towns, large villages, and high-roads, and I said to myself: 'It will be better to go along the bye-roads; you won't be seen so much, and it will be better to beg food of the poor people of the country, at the doors of isolated houses, than of the rich tradesmen of the towns. Where you find more misery, there you will find more pity and less insult.' This is singular, sir; but it is nevertheless quite true. You might say that the rich think: 'Pooh! we shall never fall so low;' and that the poor think, 'Ah! we may be as badly off to-morrow.' This makes them better understand that word of God which

says: 'As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.' And then I have always found that misery opens the heart, but wealth hardens it. This is not invariably the case, of course; there are servants of God among the wealthy as well as among the indigent; and there are some rich people who take as much pleasure in giving as the poor do in receiving. But you do not always happen to knock at the good Samaritan's door. It is better, when you thus humble yourself, to ask of the lowly and not of the great. And then, the unfortunate are never ashamed of misery. Sometimes they have no bread to give you, but they never insult you. So I said to myself: 'Walk only through the fields, and stop only at the doors of cottages;' and I found this the best plan.

XCVII.

"You will ask me: 'But whither were you going, Genevieve?' Ah! sir, I quite expect such a question; but as I hope for heaven, whenever I put it to myself, I could never answer it clearly. At all events I was travelling nearer to that ridge of the Chartreuse mountains that lies between Voiron and Saint Laurent; either because the same instinct that brings the rabbit back to the burrow it has left, made me turn unconsciously towards the scenes of my youth and of my love; or because I had a confused notion that I should find more charity by going higher up the mountains and thus getting nearer to heaven; or because my good angel was leading me by the hand, although I did not know it, towards the asylum of my salvation.

XCVIII.

"You would have been pained and shocked to see me, sir; my dress, my stockings, my handkerchief, and my shoes were all so much soiled with the mud of the roads, saturated with the rain and snow, and torn by the flints and thorns of the bye-paths and fields. In spite of all this, sir, I met with a kind reception in all the cottages which I saw of an evening, and to which I bent my steps to beg a few pieces of rye-bread, and a little hay or straw to sleep upon in some corner for the night. They made me draw near to the fire, and

frequently gave me some milk, butter, or honey, together with my bread. They generally allowed me to sleep in the cow-house, where it was so warm and smelt so nice, and where I was lulled to sleep by the peaceful rumination of the cattle. When, in the morning, I was still too wet or too tired to be able to go on my journey, they would say to me: 'Stay as long as you please, poor woman, you will bring our cattle good fortune; we have never shut our door against misery. How do we know but that we might refuse to receive providence and salvation into our house?'

"But I never abused their kindness, sir; and, as soon as ever my poor legs were strong enough to bear me, I thanked the mistress gratefully, taught the little children some prayer or other, and went away to seek some other refuge that I might not remain too long at the expense of the same family. They used to say: 'She is a pilgrim who has made a vow to Saint Bruno, and is performing it in spite of the inclemency of the weather;' but they always spoke to one another about me in a low voice. The peasants are not inquisitive, sir; they say, every one has his own thoughts, and other people's secrets are not ours.

XCIX.

"After all, my life would not have been painful beyond endurance if I had not been obliged to seek a fresh shelter every day, and if the weather had not been so cold. But it was then a little after Christmas; and the higher I went up the mountains, the more did the ice, snow, and fogs, hang like white oil upon the branches of the fir-trees. They covered the earth with a shroud that made all the valleys, all the mountains, all the fields, and all the roads, resemble one another. I could only recognize the fields by the footmarks which the little birds, the kids, and the rabbits had left on the white cloak of the herbage; I could only find the foot-paths by the deep but unequal holes which the sure foot of the mules had made in the snow, and which the wind had not entirely effaced. Sometimes I wandered out of the road, and got half buried in the white dust with which the ravines were filled; but the branches of the holly-trees and barberry-bushes that rose above the surface, kept me up, and, thank God! I only suffered this misfortune of losing my shoes.

‘Well!’ said I to myself when I got out again, ‘you were born with naked feet, were you not? Then you can live in the same state!’ And I took courage when I thought: ‘The snow will melt, and after having walked bare-footed upon the ice, you will have to walk bare-footed upon the tender grass and flowers of spring. Such is life; you must take it as God has made it; to find fault with it would only be to put yourself in a bad temper; it is better to look at the sky than at your feet, for there at least you sometimes see the sun or a star. Forward!’ And I went on, sir.”

“Good Genevieve?” said I to her, “what admirable resignation and courage you possess!”

And I could not help regarding her with admiration, so much moved was I by the words of this excellent woman. She cast down her eyes in silence, and did not resume her narrative till the next evening, when the *Angelus* had sounded.

C.

“However, one day I fell into a great misfortune, or rather I should say, I just escaped falling into one. However, if I had died there, I should have had a magnificent shroud all the same. This is how it was, sir.

“I had, one fine winter’s morning, left a farm-house that was very high up among the mountains, and I was going up higher still, whither I knew not, along gorges separated by torrents which I crossed without being able to see them, because they were covered with a crust of ice, and the falling avalanches had rested upon that crust. I had been told that there were a number of scattered cottages on the side of Savoy, and that the people there were kind and humane. I thought I might be able to get my bread there by spinning black wool or peeling hemp during the winter. So I went forward bare-footed, but with confidence in God, and with the hope that my life as a beggar would soon come to an end; for I had always been ashamed of eating the bread of other people, without having earned it.

“It was about three or four o’clock in the afternoon. I knew this by the sun, which I caught momentary glimpses of through the heavy grey clouds that ran across the sky, like frightened flocks, driven along by the furious wind. The moun-

tains cracked beneath my feet, the fir-trees hissed, bent, and broke every now and then, and were rolled along root uppermost, with avalanches of snow and stones, into ravines so deep that I dared not look down them. I crept along the brink of these abysses, holding on to the icy branches, to save myself from the wind, which had carried away my bonnet, my cap, and my comb, which was lashing my face with my hair until it bled profusely, and which seemed desirous of tearing off my gown, and casting me quite naked into that sea of frothing snow. I cried out, but I could not hear my own voice, for the squall carried away the sound as soon as it had left my lips; it was so strong, sir, that it drove my eyelids into my eyes. At the same time, this wind raised such clouds of dust and dropped them again so suddenly, that heaven, earth, the air, the light, and the snow, were confounded together, and formed only a single element, half transparent, half dark, half stifling, half respirable, through which I advanced with my hands stretched out before me just as though I had been groping in a dark cellar without a candle. The night fell rapidly and it was soon quite dark; I was afraid to go forward for fear of falling down a precipice, so I sat down on a heap of snow, and awaited my last hour, praying to God in a low voice. I was not afraid of death, sir, but I was afraid of being disinterred the next day, by the wolves, who would tear off my dress and scatter my poor naked limbs over the road, to be seen by the passers-by. And yet, in the midst of my fear and my horror, I felt disposed to sleep, and frequently let my head fall on the snow as though it had been a pillow. The cold rain mingling with the snow, and falling upon my face, awoke me; I sat up on my seat and asked myself: 'Where am I?'

CI.

"Alas! sir, I was not very far from succour, but the wind, the dust, and the rain, were so violent and loud, and the night was so dark, that no one could either see or hear me. Besides, I had not called out for a long while. The wind had now fallen a little, the snow was beginning to melt and give way under me, and the clouds looked neither so low nor so heavy, but left large blue and black spaces in the sky,

in which I could perceive some stars shining brightly. The night was far advanced; it must by this time have been two or three o'clock in the morning. I had shivered, prayed, or dreamed, without suspecting it, during more than half the night. Oh! what a night it was. But do not alarm yourself, sir, I will soon tell you the end of all.

CII.

"I stood up on my benumbed legs; I could no longer feel my feet, they were so frozen. I saw nothing, it was too dark; but while listening so attentively that I should almost have heard a flake of snow fall upon the dumb carpeting of the mountains, I suddenly heard, close by me, the low bellowing of a cow, which was answered by the crowing of a cock, which perhaps was singing in its dreams, or had taken the glimmer of a star for the first ray of morning light.

"I cannot describe to you what I felt, sir, when I heard the cow and the cock. I said to myself; 'Man is there!' It seemed to me as though some one had dragged me out of a river in which I was drowning, and had placed me in the palace and bed of a queen. I fell down with the reaction of my emotion, and then I knelt and thanked God for his mercy, and listened once more. The cock crowed again, as if it had been calling me, and again the heifer lowed more quietly from the depths of her stall. I walked carefully forward in the direction of the sound; and soon I perceived a black patch of fir-trees on the slope of a hill, and the outline of a house and farm-buildings upon the white sheet of snow that covered all the rest of the ground. In a few minutes I found myself, by the dim light of the stars, in a courtyard, in which there were a well, a dunghill, some carts, some ox-yokes and harrows resting against the wall, and a wooden staircase leading from the courtyard into the house. I could see no light of a fire through the windows; I could hear no voices nor footsteps in the house; I did not dare to call out, for fear that I might be taken for a robber. I could not remain outside for the rest of the night without dying of cold and of fear. I was very bold, sir; I conjectured that there was a stable, as I had heard a cow; I felt with my hands along the wall of the house until I found a door.

according to the custom in the mountains, it was only fastened by a peg of wood, tied by a string, and pushed into a hole in another piece of wood, just like a cork is pushed into the neck of a bottle. I pulled back the peg, opened the door, shut it noiselessly after me, and found myself in a stable in which there were several animals, as I perceived by the noise they made, and where it was as warm as the vicar's parlour used to be when I made a fire in the stove there, so that he might read his breviary in peace.

"The cows did not take much notice of me. I only heard the sound of two or three of the bells which they had on their necks, and which tinkled when they raised their heads to see who it was that had come into their stable so early."

CIII.

"The shelter, the warmth, and the nice smell of the stable in which the cows lay sleeping on a wooden floor, which in these mountains, as in those of Switzerland and Mount Jura, was well washed and swept every day, re-animated me in a few moments more thoroughly than a good fire like ours would have done, and restored to me my feelings and thoughts. I groped my way along, lighted only by the little moonlight that shone through a window, and by the eyes of the cows which glittered like stars in the darkness, and I proceeded to the end of the stable, where it was warmer than near the door; I took an armful of dry hay from the rack, and lay down upon it, all shivering and wet with the snow, by the side of a magnificent black heifer, which moved to make room for me in her stall, and warmed me with her breath, as she smelt the stranger who had come to share her litter. I coaxed her in a low voice and patted her with my hand, and in a minute she was as sociable with me, and chewed her cud as peacefully as if I had been the milk-maid or the stable-maid. The hay into which I plunged my feet, hands, and head, the warm atmosphere, and the breath of the cows, soon dried me from the dampness of the storm. My body got as warm by the side of the heifer as it would have done before any fire. I felt that I was in a refuge which God had provided for me on the top of the mountains, similar to that in which the Holy Virgin had taken shelter in former times. This

recollection, which occurred to my mind at that moment, took away all the humiliation I had felt at begging half her stall of a heifer. I said to myself: 'Think! the handmaid of God was not ashamed of a stable, and why should you be so?' And I finished by going to sleep quietly, although the wind was making the shutters of the stable-windows clatter, and the sleet was driving against the glass.

CIV.

"When I awoke, it seemed as though I had slept a whole night, I felt so fresh and supple in all my limbs, and so thoroughly rested. However, the first faint gleam of morning light was then only just beginning to enter into the stable through the holes in the shutters, and the chinks between the threshold and the door. I beheld a beautiful stable, the walls of which were as white as chalk, and the ceiling of which was formed of large unbarked fir-trunks, between the crevices of which straws from the well-filled hay-loft, hung like lustres. On the shining beechen shelves, that were fixed against the wall, I saw pails of fir-wood as yellow as gold, butter wells and stamps, and rows of dishes of varnished earthenware, some of which were deep, while others were large and shallow, so that the milk might spread over a larger surface in them, and the cream might be skimmed off more easily afterwards with a maple spoon. There were nine beautiful cows, of different sizes and colours, each in their own stall. They were black, white, brown, and brindled; all were fat, and their skin shone as brightly, and their tails were as well combed as if they had only just come from grass. Their leathern collars and bells even had been left round their necks, because the noise pleases them when stabled during the winter, by reminding them of the meadows.

CV.

"As I stood admiring the cows, the pails, the dishes, the straw and the hay, I felt myself devoured by hunger and thirst. There was a great deal of cream in a large flat earthenware basin, close by me; but I did not venture to take a drop of it without having asked leave of its owners.

'It is quite enough,' I said, 'for me to have borrowed a place by the side of their cows, and to have enjoyed the warmth of their stable, without, in addition, stealing the cream from their dairy.' I would die, I thought, rather than touch it, or even covet it. I turned my head in another direction that I might not see the temptation. I said: 'When they have got up, they will give me a piece of bread and a drop of water before they tell me the road to the next village or to another farm-house.' Nevertheless, sir, when I reflected that I had no handkerchief upon my neck, nor cap on my head, nor shoes to my feet, and when I looked at my tattered and muddy dress, I was so ashamed of myself, and so afraid of the opinion that they would entertain of me when they saw me in such a plight, that I was ready to run away without waiting for anything to eat or drink, so that no one might see me.

"But while I was deliberating with myself, and was just going to get up from my bed and make my escape, I heard the noise of footsteps, some light, the others heavy, descending the outside staircase of the house. Presently the stable-door opened, and two women came in talking together. One was a little peasant girl of about sixteen years of age, the other a beautiful young woman, who appeared to be the mistress of the first, and who might have been twenty-four years old. Although she held herself upright and still walked nimbly, she was pregnant, and apparently not very far from her confinement.

"When I saw these two women appear in the doorway, at the very moment when I had made up my mind to run away, all I had time to do was to hide myself behind the black heifer at the furthest end of the stable. I thought that she would be the last that the women would come to milk, and that I should thus have time, before presenting myself before them, to arrange my hair a little, and to conceal my naked feet in the straw while speaking to them.

"'Claudine,' said the mistress in a clear and pleasant voice, 'you forgot to fasten the peg yesterday, after you had littered the cows down, for it was hanging by the string when we came in.'

"'Yes, mistress, I did fasten it,' replied the girl; 'but the violent wind last night must have shaken the door, and made the latch fall.'

"Imagine how uneasy I was, so near being convicted of having broken open a door. I hardly ventured to breathe.

"They continued talking together while they were skimming the milk and preparing the pans. Then the servant, sitting down on a three-legged stool, near the first cow, began to milk it into a pail of white wood, whilst the pretty young housewife, who could not stoop on account of her condition, stood leaning against the door-post, with her hands folded over her apron, talking and laughing with the young girl.

"I would have given half my life to have sunk under the earth. The idea occurred to me of hiding myself in the straw under the manger, but I said to myself: 'That would make a noise, and the wooden hay-fork would find you out.' I perspired with fear, sir; I, who had shivered so with the cold on the evening before. But this was nothing to what was in store for me. Pay attention, sir, and I will tell you something worse than anything I have told you yet, and which, perhaps, had never before happened since the world was created."

My interest redoubled when I saw the interest that the poor woman herself attached to what she was about to relate. She went on:—

CVI.

"While the maid was milking the cows one after another, and getting continually nearer to the corner where I was crouching motionless like a condemned criminal, I took occasional glances at her young mistress, to see if her face promised unkindness or compassion. The sun was now rising, and one of his rays striking on the door, cast a reflection on her head, and lighted up her charming but rather languishing features. I opened my eyes as wide as the double heartsease in my flower-pot. The more I looked at her, the more I fancied that I had already seen somewhere that beautiful face, those chestnut tresses, those elegant shoulders, that swanlike neck, that smiling mouth, and those lovely dark eyes, that were as sparkling and tender as fire shining through a wet sieve. I said to myself: 'Pooh! it's impossible; you had never in your life been to this out of the way place, before that terrible night on which the storm drove

you hither. But it was useless to argue thus with myself; my eyes knew better than my reasoning, and continually said to me: 'You have seen her before.' Think now, this is not the first time that her face has met your eyes; come, recollect yourself.'

CVII.

" 'Just heaven!' I suddenly cried to myself in a low tone, starting backwards as if I had received a blow in the chest, and shuddering all over; 'Just heaven! my eyes told me only too truly. Unhappy wretch! where will you conceal yourself? That is the face of the young girl who came one day into your shop at Voiron to ask you to make her wedding dress for her,' as she was going to be married to—to Cyprien! . . . Yes, and that same dress which she is now wearing was made by my hands . . . I recognise it now, though it is somewhat faded . . . Mercy! where has the anger of the Lord cast me! O my good angel! cover me with your wings, make me invisible, and conceal my misery and my humiliation from her who is justly enjoying the wealth, the good name and the happiness which were once within my reach, but which I lost by betraying Cyprien!'

CVIII.

"I said all this and a thousand other things to myself, sir, much more quickly than words could have expressed them. It was an assault of thoughts which overthrew one another in my head, and gave me the same dizziness that I had felt on the brink of the great precipice while coming hither. I blushed, I turned pale, I bit my lips, I pinched my arms to prevent myself from crying out. I was turned into stone, or rather I did not know what I was; my heart beat and yet seemed still; I was like a living corpse!"

"Ah! poor Genevieve! what a dreadful situation to be in!" said I, passing my hand over my eyes.

CIX.

"A dreadful situation, indeed, sir," she continued; "just imagine my position. Look at me, Genevieve, still young,

and rather pretty, as people said, a good and honest needle-woman, passing for an excellent tailoress, and thought to have a thriving business, receiving this young girl into my shop, selling to her as to a child all that she wanted, undressing and dressing her in my room, putting on her ear-rings and necklaces, making her more beautiful than a queen, that she might go and marry my own betrothed, and make him forget me, by pleasing him more. Look at this young girl, laughing and talking, proud at having even entered into my shop, and of having been dressed and adorned by me,—who thinks me a rich and orderly woman, almost a lady! . . . who marries the love of my youth, my betrothed, I may say; who is proud, and rich, and happy with him in his house, which has now become hers, in that house in which my betrothal-feast had taken place; for now I well remember the cows which Cyprien had named to me in the meadow! And then, look at me now, a vile, dishonoured beggar, just out of jail, tramping through the country, having sold my goods, without a roof to sleep under or bread to eat, without a gown, a cap, or even wooden shoes, found by this young girl now that she has become his wife! . . . and where? . . . lying in the straw, with the cows in her husband's stable! . . . Oh, it was too much! Never, no, never, had human disgrace gone so far!

“These were the thoughts that filled my mind, sir, and I wished that the power of God would transform me into one of those despised animals that graze on the earth, and eat from the manger, and plough the land under the guidance of the farmer, rather than let me appear in the place and in the dress that I was, before the eyes of her who had been my rival.

CX.

“But time was passing away, and, alas, the wall against which I was leaning did not move farther away from the milkmaid. Whilst I remained overwhelmed and undecided by these thoughts, the girl, taking her stool in her left hand, and her pail of milk in her right, passed slowly from one cow to another, until she came to the last but one. I say slowly, sir, not because she appeared slow to me, for I fancied she went like the wind, and I was always hoping that there were *

a number of cows between the one she was milking and the black heifer, so that I might have time to think and to decide. Perhaps, I said to myself, the mistress will go away, or the girl will forget to milk the black heifer, or perhaps the heifer has not calved yet, and yields no milk. In short, sir, I caught at any shadow of hope that appeared before me.

CXI.

"But all the branches break one after another when the wood is ripe, say the woodmen. Just as the girl had finished milking the eighth cow, and was taking up her stool to come into the stall of the black heifer, she saw me there still motionless and hesitating, uttered a cry, dropped her pail of milk, spilt the contents all over the floor, and ran to her mistress, saying: 'There's a beggar-woman there!' pointing with a gesture of alarm towards the end of the stable, and running out into the court-yard to call the people of the house.

"I instinctively took advantage of the moment when the terrified girl rushed out of the stable, to issue from my hiding-place, with my head bent down and my hands folded, and to walk very gently and slowly towards the young mistress, who had remained standing at the door. She uttered a cry of compassion and made a gesture of pity at seeing my forlorn condition, my humble attitude, and my tattered clothes. I fell on my knees before her, with my face almost touching her feet, hoping that at least she would not recognize me.

"'Pardon me my fault,' I said to her; 'if I ventured to come into your stable without your leave, it was because I was forced unwillingly to do so by the storm and the cold; but I will go away; and you see I have robbed you of nothing,' added I, showing her my hands and my empty pockets.

"When I had said this I rose up, with my head still bent, and I moved forward so as to pass between her and the door, and to escape the observation of the other inhabitants as I fled from the house.

"But she, being a woman of humane disposition, said to me in a gentle voice, as she placed herself before me to prevent me from going out: 'No, poor girl, you shall not go away in this state; it shall not be said that you left our

house without having sat by our fire and eaten our bread. God would make our salt melt and our cows lean if we were to let you. Come with me, you shall breakfast with us.'

"While she was speaking thus, she looked attentively in my face, which I found it impossible to conceal entirely from her. Suddenly she uttered a cry as I had done, and said: 'Is it possible?—Miss Genevieve here,—in this misery,—begging her bread?'

"I saw that all was lost, and trusting only to her compassion to let me escape. 'Yes, Catherine,' I said in a low tone, 'it is I; it is the tailoress of Voiron, who made this gown for you, and who dressed you handsomely for your marriage, when she was herself rich and honoured by all in her own rank in life.' Then, taking hold of the hem of her gown in both hands, I added: 'In the name of this wedding-dress that I made for you in by-gone times, in the name of the child that you will soon bear, let me depart without eating or drinking anything, that Cyprien, your husband, may not see my shame and my poverty!'

CXII.

"Catherine raised her hand to her eyes, as though my words had gone to her heart, so compassionate did she seem to poor people, when a great noise of persons coming down the wooden staircase was heard mingling with the cries of the little milkmaid. Cyprien, his father, his lame old mother, and the girl entered the stable together. I remained like one thunderstruck, on my knees, with my head bent down, and holding in both hands the hem of the gown of Cyprien's wife. A bright ray of the morning sun unfortunately shone fully upon my head, as though God had intended that I should blush before the fire of heaven.

CXIII.

"'This is Genevieve, the tailoress of Voiron,' said Catherine to them as they came in. 'Would you ever have thought to see a girl so rich and so much esteemed in such a condition?' added she, pointing to my tattered gown, my naked shoulders, my hair filled with bits of hay, and my shoeless feet. 'What may not happen to us!'

"At the name of Genevieve, every countenance assumed a severe and harsh expression; no one either said a word or made a movement, except Cyprien, who turned back as if he had been pulled from behind, and put his face against the wall, and his two hands over his face, to conceal the grief he felt at seeing me again in such a plight.

"'Yes, what may not happen to us!' said at length the old mother, taking up the exclamation of her daughter-in-law; 'what may not happen to us when God abandons us, and after we have long deceived our neighbours, it is found that we are not what we seem to be, and we are thrown into contempt, just as a bad-smelling flower is thrown on to a dunghill!'

"I made no answer.

"'To think,' cried the old man, 'that a girl who was too honest to rob a poor man of sixpence, should have been willing to sell her honour to a soldier for nothing, and to throw away the life and name of her child! For we know all about it! Rumour comes up to the mountains as surely as a mule steps.'

"'And to think,' resumed the old woman, interrupting him, 'that such a creature might have been the wife of our Cyprien, and that she sat in a silk gown and a lace head-dress, on a chair, at the betrothal table, beside his father and me!'

"'Oh! my father and mother,' cried Cyprien, taking his hands from before his face, and turning towards us with his eyes all red and wet with tears, 'do not thus reproach her; she betrayed me, it is true,' added he, sobbing; 'but I am so happy with my dear wife Catherine, and she is so unfortunate, that we ought not to upbraid and distress her!'

"'Oh, yes, M. Cyprien,' said I, still remaining on my knees, but turning towards the side whence his voice had come, and keeping my eyes fixed on the ground; 'oh, yes. I was a great traitress to you; you might hate me for it, but you are as kind-hearted as ever, I can see; and as you are very happy with your present wife, who is much better and much prettier than I am, pardon me the past, and permit me to go and seek for food elsewhere. I did not know I was in your stable,—I would rather have entered the gates of purgatory; but the darkness of the night and the providence of

God forced me to seek shelter in the only farm-house that I was anxious to avoid.'

CXIV.

"While I was saying this to Cyprien, with downcast eyes and fast-rolling tears, I heard another person come hastily down the staircase from the hay-loft, where the room was situated which Cyprien had formerly pointed out to me, and I saw the shadow of a fourth woman pass along the floor, and join the group of three women who stood beside the door, looking at me.

" 'Oh, no, we are not at all offended with you,' said the old man, 'for refusing to be our daughter-in-law; on the contrary, we thank God for it daily. What a reputation you would have brought into a country of honest folks, like ours!'

" 'Oh, no, neither Cyprien nor any of us are offended with you,' repeated the old woman. 'God kindly protected us, on the contrary, by unmasking you as he did, before your name was connected with ours! Go, Miss Genevieve,—go, wicked daughter and wicked mother,—go and eat elsewhere the morsel of bread that may be thrown to you, and take good note of the road that you may never come this way again. There are some people who ought never to be seen where they are known.'

" 'Genevieve!' cried a voice that sounded familiarly and kindly in my ears; 'Genevieve! What? is this ragged beggar-girl, whom you have been insulting and reproaching for the last hour, and who is kneeling there shivering before you,—is she Genevieve? Ah! you ought to be ashamed of yourselves!'

"And saying this, she ran hastily towards me, and raised me up, adding,

" 'Ah, well! I'm not ashamed of her!'

"I raised my head, and opened my eyes at her voice and movement, and though almost blinded by my tears I recognized—whom do you think?—Mother Bélan, the midwife of Voiron, the same whom I had liberated from prison by going there myself.

CXV.

"Mother Bélan took me in her arms and kissed me at least twenty times in presence of all the rest, who were quite at a loss to understand her conduct towards me. I made signs to her to be quiet, and not to divulge my secret, but to let me pass for what I was not.

" 'No, no, it is too much for me to endure,' cried she, stamping with her foot upon the stable floor, and putting her two hands upon her hips, to look steadily at Cyprien's father and mother, whose faces were expressive of disgust at her proceedings. 'No, it is too much for me to endure! I would rather break my oath, and save the character of this good girl, than keep it and allow her, though innocent, to be condemned and insulted!'

"I put my hand upon her mouth, and implored her to say nothing; but she pushed my hand away, and turning towards them all, said:

" 'I will speak out for once in my life. I'll have my own way for once! Well, do you people know whom you are insulting, and despising, and treating as badly as if she were a mere crossing-sweeper?'

"They were all silent.

" 'No? Well, I'll tell you, and then perhaps you will learn not to speak again until you know what you're talking about.'

" 'Well, who is she?' asked the old man, picking up courage to address her.

" 'The honestest and best girl in Voiron,—a voluntary victim suffering for a crime that she never committed!'

"She said this, sir, stamping so furiously with her feet, and looking in the faces of them all with so confident an air, raising her voice to such a pitch, and emphasizing some words so loudly, that all her hearers trembled, and drew nearer to her, so that they might not miss a word of what she said.

"Then, in spite of all my efforts to restrain her, she told them all, sir. My supernatural attachment to Josette, my promise to be as a mother to her, my grief at having been obliged to give up Cyprien, so that I might not be compelled to leave her, her secret marriage with the young quartermaster, the birth of her child, her death, the accusation

brought against the midwife, my taking the fault upon myself to save the memory and the virgin cross of my sister, my generosity (for so she called it, sir) in coming to liberate her from prison, being confined there myself, and allowing people to think me guilty of a fault I had never committed,—all this she told them, and omitted no particular.

“ ‘And see!’ added she, forcing me to be quiet whenever I attempted to stop or to contradict her, ‘see! here she is willing again to be insulted and despised by you, and suffering misery, shame, hunger, and cold, rather than reclaim what properly belongs to her—her reputation and her virtue . . . and now you know all.’ ”

“Then she wept over me, and kissed me, and said to me :

“ ‘Miss Genevieve, forgive me for what I have done ; I am sure your poor sister, who is now in heaven, forgives me. If these people will not do you justice, come home with me ; you shall be a daughter to me, and I will boast before all Voreen of sharing my bed and board with the most chaste and honest girl in the country.’ ”

CXV

“No one said anything, sir ; but every one burst into tears. At last, Cyprien and his wife knelt down before him and he said :

“ ‘Forgive us, Miss Genevieve, for having wronged you. But you would have it so. I have always felt convinced that there must be some mystery in the matter, and that when you bade me farewell on the bridge, you had no intention of discarding my affection and deceiving me. But how could we have thought otherwise? You must forgive my father and mother for having been deceived. When there are fogs in the plain, they become clouds in the mountains. We have not been able to see clearly through them until to-day. But my wife, I am sure, will love you dearly, and my father and mother will treat you like a recovered daughter. I will stand to you in the stead of your brother, the soldier, until he returns home again. I have two children already, and I shall have a third very soon ; that is why the nurse is here, as it were by miracle. God is God, you see ; and what the lowlanders call chance, we mountaineers call Providence.’ ”

My mother is old; my father is not the man he used to be; Catherine will have enough to do to attend to her three children, and needs some one to help her in the house'

" 'Yes,' said Catherine, interrupting him, 'that is just what I was going to say.'

" 'Yes,' said the father, 'that reminds me of the story of the sixpence. I shall not be afraid of her robbing us.'

" 'Yes,' said the mother, 'that makes me think of the betrothal-day; she served at table excellently.'

" 'Yes, yes, yes,' said Mother Bélan, making Catherine and me kiss each other; 'come, Genevieve, and I will lend you some clothes, a cap, a gown, and some shoes, that you may not enter, in your beggar's dress, into the house which you formerly entered as a betrothed bride. After you have changed your things, we will have breakfast.'

CXVII.

"And thus I became a servant, and a very willing one, in the house where I might have been the mistress, but without feeling any ill-will, sir; remembering with pleasure that I had once loved Cyprien, and loving his wife dearly for his sake.

CXVIII.

"This lasted for three years and two months. I loved the house, I loved my employers, I loved the children, I loved the cows, I loved the stable, in a room above which I now slept, in a comfortable bed, within hearing of the bells of the cattle. I used to spend the greater part of the day, during the summer months, in watching the heifers graze in the upper meadows, by the fir-patch, and knitting stockings, or saying my prayers. I used to say to myself, when I saw the whirlwinds of snow gambolling over the tops of the trees, and powdering the meadows, 'Look now at what might have been your shroud, but which was the means of leading you to a good house, where you no longer fear shame, hunger, or cold.' Ah! sir, we never know how the grace of God acts; we never believe in it sufficiently! Then I was anxious about scarcely anything.

CXIX.

"Well, I was wrong, nevertheless, we must never tempt God, either by an excess of mistrust, or by an excess of presumption. We frequently possess happiness when we think it is far off. We frequently speak too loudly of our happiness, and misfortune is at our door.

"Misfortune! . . . ah! what a misfortune! It arrived in a way that no one had ever thought of.

"You know to what I refer, sir. You are young; but it happened only ten years ago. You have heard talk of the disease which doctors called the epidemic, and which caused the death of so many poor people during the three months that it ravaged, first the valleys, and then these mountains, where it is said that the eagles took it and communicated it to the other birds, and the other birds to the fowls, and the fowls to the insects, and the insects to men. It came up here, sir, and began by carrying off the vicar, as though it expected then to have more liberty to ravage his flock; then it knocked at the door of almost every house, like the churchwarden does, when he goes about collecting the rates. The carpenter and his two sons were quite unable to supply the demand for coffins. Presently one of the sons died, then the other, and then the father. We were obliged to bury the last without a coffin, in nothing but his shroud.

"Ever since the beginning of the epidemic I had left the cows alone in the meadows, and devoted myself to taking care of the sick. As I came from the town, and was more expert at applying remedies and watching patients than the peasant-women of the village, Cyprien and his wife had allowed me to join the two sisters of charity who had come from Grenoble to attend to the dying. I assisted them in the performance of their duties for the love of God; and I learned from them how to make all the medicines that were prepared in the hospitals. When they had both obtained death as the reward of their beneficence, I was the only nurse left in the whole neighbourhood.

"But, alas! although Cyprien's house stood by itself, and was exposed to a current of wholesome and refreshing air from the ravine above, death found its way thither. They all died in my arms; first his father, then his young wife,

with her three little children, in three days, and then poor Cyprien himself, half of grief, and half of the disease. It was I who watched by his bedside on the night after his death, and took off his marriage ring from his finger, to wear it at least after his death, in memory of our betrothal. (May God forgive me!) Alas! I thought that I had forgotten the past; but I soon discovered that I loved him still, without knowing it. Our eyes are like the oranges that I used to squeeze to make a draught for him, sir; when you have squeezed them once, you fancy there is no juice left in them; but if you squeeze them again, you find there is plenty remaining; it does not run out, that is all. His old mother was the only one who survived.

“ ‘Death will not take me, because of my sins against you, Genevieve,’ said she. ‘I have been too harsh towards you, and God is punishing me for it. I will return to my relations.’

CXX.

“It was at this time, sir, that the new vicar, your poor friend, came to the parish in the stead of the deceased vicar, like a forlorn hope that is sent forward to the breach to fill the trench with his body, or to keep the banner floating a moment longer. No servant had been willing to come with him from the town; he could offer no wages, except the trouble of relieving the dying, and giving some of his goats’ milk to the little orphans whose mothers had been carried off by the epidemic. The poor young man, though he was very humane and very kind-hearted, could not do everything; he could not attend to his patients with the skilful and gentle hands of a woman who was accustomed to invalids and children. I asked him if he would have me for a servant, as I was well known in the place, and could do a little of everything. ‘We will not speak about wages, sir,’ I said to him; ‘you shall give me my food and clothing, and I shall spend my evenings in peeling hemp, spinning wool, or making stockings, that will be enough for me. I was not so rich when I came up here; and I can return to the valley as poor as I left it, if you ever send me away.’

“He agreed to this arrangement, and I entered upon my last place.

CXXI.

"Ah! sir, how happy I was in his service, and what a compensation for all my troubles our merciful God had provided for me! Think, sir, he was so good, and so charitable that he would have given away all that he had, and not left an ounce of salt in the cupboard, or a single salad in the garden, if I had not looked after him. He never uttered an angry word; and though always sad, he was always resigned. I had to do about as much cooking as would have been required for a fly, and to keep bread upon the table for any beggar that might knock at the door. Then I had to attend to the cow, the goat, the dog, and the birds; to keep the bee-hives well surrounded with stocks beneath the window, and take care of the flower-pots that stood in the balcony. Mine was a peaceful life, sitting all day, either in the kitchen, or in the sun at the door; teaching the children to spell, and chatting with the poor women, who used to bring their spinning-wheels and sit with me round the warm fire on a winter's evening. I had nothing to do but to light the tapers when a baptism took place, and to receive boxes of comfits from the godfathers and godmothers, as they came out of the church. Every morning and evening I could spend in prayer, for as long as it pleased my heart to do so. I was too happy, sir; it could not last long."

CXXII.

"But, my poor Genevieve," said I, "what are you going to do with yourself now?"

"Oh! sir, I feel no anxiety about my fate," she answered. "He who led me by the hand from my coffin in the snow to Father Cyprien's warm stable, will continue to lead me whithersoever it may please him. Are there not many more stables among the mountains? and am I not well known and loved by all? I may boast of this now without vanity. There are many good people who would give me board and lodging for the weeding I should do in the spring, the wheat should glean in the summer, and the distaffs I should spin during the winter. I only ask for enough to supply my wants, and they are not numerous, and the folks about here

are generous. Do not be anxious about me. And then if I become infirm, I know the sisters of Grenoble; they will willingly give me a bed in their hospital. Do I need more?"

"Oh!" I answered, "I hope that when all the little debts have been paid, there will remain a small surplus of the proceeds of the sale of my poor friend's furniture, and I shall ask you to accept it in remembrance of him and me."

"Oh! sir," she replied, "you need not think about me. ~~has~~ not our good God taken care of me hitherto, and will He not continue to do so until I am laid in the grave here with Cyprien and his wife, and my poor master, in the cemetery? There are beds for every one in that last hostelry upon earth. All we need to strive after is to go thither with a good conscience, and without regret!

"And then, sir," added she, rising quickly from her chair, and taking out of her drawer her missal, which was quite rumpled and worn by constant use, she opened it at a page marked by a piece of folded paper; "I will tell you another thing that has always comforted me.

CXXIII.

"One evening last winter, an old man came here dressed like a hermit, and asked to be allowed to remain at the parsonage for the night. The vicar was absent at Grenoble; but I nevertheless received the poor pilgrim into the house. I made some soup and boiled some eggs for him, prepared his bed, and then we spent the evening in talking together by the fireside until it was nearly midnight. Ah! sir, except it was the vicar, when he spoke about God manifested in the flesh, I never heard any one speak as that old man did. I looked at him sometimes, expecting to find that he was an angel in disguise! I begged him to teach me a prayer suitable for a person of my condition: and when he went away the next morning, he gave me this piece of paper, upon which he had written a prayer for me, and told me to read it sometimes in remembrance of him. Here it is, sir; read it."

And I read:

THE SERVANT'S PRAYER.

"O, Lord God! graciously grant that I may find my servi-

tude pleasant, and may endure it without murmuring, as the condition that thou didst impose upon us all in sending us into the world. If we do not serve one another, we cannot serve God; for human life is but a reciprocal service. The most happy are those who serve their neighbours without wages, for love of Thee. But we, poor servants, must earn the bread with which thou didst not supply us at our birth. We are, perhaps, even more pleasing in thine eyes on this account, if we understand our condition aright; for, besides our labour, we have to endure the humiliation of receiving payment for serving those whom we love. We belong to every house, and all houses may be shut against us; we belong to every family, and yet all families may reject us; we bring up children as though they were our own, and when we have brought them up, they will not recognize us to be their mothers; we are saving of our masters' property, and the property that we have saved for them is bestowed on others and not upon us! We become attached to the fireside, to the trees, to the well, to the dog in the court-yard, and yet we may be separated from them all at the whim of our masters; our master dies, and we have no right to go into mourning for him! Relations without consanguinity, familiars without a family, daughters without mothers, mothers without children, hearts that offer themselves and are not accepted;—such is the lot of servants in thy sight! Grant me to know the duties, the sufferings, and the consolations of my condition; and after I have been a good servant of men here below, may I become a happy servant of the perfect Master in heaven above!"

CXXIV.

Here ended the narrative of Genevieve. When she had concluded it, she went on as quietly with her knitting as though I had only interrupted her work and the ordinary course of her thoughts to ask her to do her one of those slight acts of service that she used to perform for me twenty times a-day. She did not think that so simple a tale was worthy to induce repose after its conclusion, still less that it was likely to inspire with the least admiration. Indeed, she had no regard for herself; she did not consider herself to hold a more important place in other people's thoughts, or even in

her own, than one of those stalks of hemp which she used to tread under foot, and to sweep into the fire after she had peeled them.

"I am of no consequence," she used to say; "God is only pleased to make me useful in some things."

I have never beheld a more remarkable instance of self-renunciation than was presented by this excellent woman.

After she had terminated her narrative, I remained for a long while looking at the fire, but not saying a word, for fear of again inspiring her simple heart with recollections of Cyprien, Josette, and Jocelyn, which could not but be productive of intense emotion. I even reproached myself for my curiosity, which it had cost her many tears to satisfy. Why should I disturb a peaceful stream merely to take a handful of sand from its bed, and look at it in the sun? That sand was intended to remain under the water. So it is with the pure or impure sediment of a hidden life. We should leave it undisturbed in its bed.

I signed to my dog, and went to rest without bidding Genevieve good-night, and taking care to walk as gently as possible through the kitchen and corridor that she might not notice my departure. She still went on with her knitting.

CXXV.

Early the next morning I heard Genevieve moving about, calling to the fowls, patting the dog, milking the goat, feeding the birds, watering the flowers, digging in the garden, dusting the furniture, attending to the door, and chatting with the peasants just as usual. It was nevertheless the day of the sale. Her heart was very full when she heard article after article of that little stock of goods disposed of, in the courtyard, to the highest bidder. But, fortunately, the sale was soon over. Before ten o'clock in the morning all had been taken away by the neighbours, who were all desirous to obtain, at any price, some relic of their departed friend and pastor; one bought the wooden bedstead, another the table, another the writing-desk, another the copper crucifix, while the women bought the poultry, and the young girls the rosaries. Cyprien's mother purchased the goat, at Genevieve's

earnest recommendation ; and I bought the dog for myself, and the birds for Genevieve. She wept bitterly as each thing was knocked down and carried off the premises. When all was sold, she and I returned sadly into the house which now looked very desolate. The walls seemed to look at us and say : "After all, what is a house, which, when full, contained so much human love, happiness, and sorrow? only a few stones bound together with a little mortar, and covered with a few tiles!"

"Alas! alas!" cried Genevieve, touching the naked walls: "is it worth while to become attached to anything? Would it not be as well to take refuge in the grave at once? I have no house of my own; but I shall always be welcome to a corner under the roof of others."

We had saved a little lunch, and so we sat down and ate it by the side of the fountain, scattering the crumbs about for the swallows, sparrows, and robins that we were going to leave behind us.

CXXVI.

"You shall come home with me to my mother's," said I to Genevieve, "and remain with us until you can get a place somewhere in the country, which will suit you better. My mother resembles you in some things,—like you she has a gentle and tender heart, and like you she has become the voluntary servant of all the neighbourhood; she is disturbed fifty times a-day, and woken up in the night sometimes, to give something to one or other of her pensioners; she is not very rich in money, but she is rich in heart; and that you know, Genevieve, is almost the same thing, for, whatever people may say, there is more friendship and service in the heart than in a crown-piece."

"That is true, sir," said she smilingly, "I had never thought of it before. But why?" added she with an inquiring look.

"Why?" I answered. "The answer is very simple; because a crown-piece is never more than a crown-piece, whereas a heart multiplies itself. And then, one is living, and the other is dead!"

"Yes! and moreover, one is warm and the other is cold," said she, finely.

We finished by smiling through our tears.

CXXVII.

"Well! sir, let us set out as soon as you like," she said to me a minute afterwards, taking up the little bundle in which her whole fortune was contained, including her clothes and the box of treasures from the chest of drawers.

"Come along," I said; and we started on our journey, not without turning back many times to look at the grey walls and reddish tiles of the parsonage, that lay now in our rear, embosomed in the fir-wood and canopied by the blue sky. We saw some swallows skim over the roof, which was now deserted by all their friends.

"Go, go, poor little things," said Genevieve, sobbing bitterly, "I shall never again be there to caress and feed your little ones, and to pick them up when they fall out of the nest!"

"Come, Genevieve, let this console you," said I; "our good and merciful God will still be there!"

"That is true, sir," answered she, drying her eyes, "but I cannot help it; it is too much for me. I cannot endure to see animals suffer. I am very glad," she added presently, "that it is fine, and everybody is at work, so that no one can come and stand before the door of their houses to see me pass by."

CXXVIII.

Whilst conversing in this manner, we were going down the rocky pathway that led from the village, and had just arrived at a turn in the road which conducted to the torrent, and where a great rock surmounted by a cross stood on our left, and concealed the red bridge from our view.

"Here is the boundary of the parish," said Genevieve sorrowfully; "I can hardly summon up courage to pass it, and to think that I shall never cross it again! and to think," added she, with a slight blush of involuntary pride, "to think that I should be going away thus, on foot, with my bundle under my arm, to receive an asylum from your mother for charity, when the first time I came to that bridge, I was mounted on a handsome mule and surrounded by the villagers who complimented me as if I had been a real lady, and threw poppies under the feet of my mule. Ah! that

was a triumph, "sir, such as I shall never witness again ! And then at that time there was another person in my heart, for Cyprien was alive, and I might have been his wife !" . . .

CXXIX.

"Come, come, don't distress yourself, Genevieve ; I am very sorry for having made you think about these things. The sun is going down, and we must get clear of the ravines before night ; but if we stand still every now and then to think about by-gone times, we shall never get to our journey's end."

And I got her to walk on faster.

But just as we were turning the angle of the rock, to walk on to the abutment of the red bridge, Genevieve stopped short, uttered an exclamation of surprise, dropped her bundle, and let it roll into the dust.

"Good heavens !" she cried, "what do I see there ?"

I stepped forward, and saw about forty men, women, and children standing together in the middle of the bridge, all holding something in their hands, and looking towards the direction from which we were coming, as though resolved to prevent some one from passing.

CXXX.

On perceiving Genevieve, they all fell into order—first the children, then the girls, then the men, then the women, then the old people,—just as it was the custom to do on Rogation Sunday and other festivals.

"Here she is—here she is !" cried the children, clapping their hands.

"Yes, here she comes with the gentleman," said the young girls.

"She thought she was going for good," said the women ; "but she will never have the heart to leave the country in this way."

"We'll take good care to prevent her," said the men, making a barricade with their arms across the bridge ; "the river belongs to God, but the bridge is ours !"

The dogs, frightened at so many people, ran behind us. Genevieve stood as motionless as a statue at the end of the bridge.

"Well, Genevieve," said I, smiling, before the procession had come quite up to us, "you were saying that you would never again behold such a triumph as that which greeted you on the day that you and your mule were stopped upon this very bridge. However, another triumph now awaits you, and if the bridge is not strewn with poppies, it is laden with hearts that all love you."

"Oh, yes, sir, replied she with a deep sigh; but there was one with me who loved me as much as all these put together!" and she sobbed with emotion.

CXXXI.

By this time the procession had reached us, and collected round us, leaving a space, however, into which a fine old man stepped forward, took a scarf out of his pocket, and put it on as gravely as if he had been going to perform a public ceremony. He then advanced towards Genevieve, unfolded a roll of paper, and read the following speech:—

"Miss Genevieve, you see here before you the magistrates, the inhabitants, the women and the children of the parish of Valneige, whom you saved from the epidemic, and whom you have tended in all their sicknesses, miseries and afflictions, not only during the year when they were deserted by everybody else, but during seven consecutive years afterwards. This is enough to induce us not to allow you, like ungrateful and ill-taught persons, to go and earn your livelihood elsewhere in your old age. It would be said in the canton, 'Look at the people of that commune, they have not even the memory of animals, for animals know the persons who have been kind to them, and attach themselves to such for life.' In the same way we, Miss Genevieve, we are all, both men and women, young and old, rich and poor, attached to you till death, and we have decided among ourselves that you shall never be allowed to cross this bridge with our consent, but that each one of us, according to his means, shall keep you for six months, three months, one month, or a week, in his house, and shall lodge, feed, and clothe you until your old age; besides which the parish shall voluntarily tax itself, without permission of the authorities or need of a collector, for the purpose of obtaining a bed and a room for you, when-

ever you may need it, in the hospital of the Sisters Hospitaliers of Grenoble, who came to help you to nurse us, and who know you. In virtue of which, I, deputy mayor of this commune, in the absence of the deceased mayor, forbid you to pass this bridge, and command you to follow me, first to my house, where my wife and daughters have prepared a bed for you !”

After this beautiful speech the deputy mayor put the paper back into his pocket, and having given the signal and the example by kissing Genevieve, all the others hastened to do the same. Then the children picked up her bundle, and carried it before her with cries of joy, and she was forced to return to the village. I bade her adieu, and kissed her in my turn, with moistened eyes and joyful heart. She sobbed so much, that she could scarcely speak to me.

“ Oh, yes, sir,” she said, “ you were right ; here is another triumph ! but I am sure I did not expect anything of the kind !”

“ No more did I,” I replied, “ but we must never despair of good feelings ; ingratitude has its day, to be sure, but so has gratitude. Farewell, Genevieve, and be happy with your now large family : it may well replace that which God has refused to grant you.”

Jocelyn's dog followed her.

EPILOGUE.

Two years after, the occurrence of the circumstances just related, a long bear-hunt, which lasted for several weeks, brought me into the forests in the neighbourhood of Valneige. I was desirous to find out what had become of poor Genevieve, so I left my hunting-companions at the inn of Abimes, and went alone to the village over the red bridge.

"Oh, Genevieve!" said the first child that I met, in answer to my inquiries, "she doesn't live now with one family after another as she used to do, they have built a little house for her between the church and the parsonage, and there are two beds there for the use of any sick people of the parish who have no one at home to nurse them: so she keeps the infirmary."

I walked thither at once; she was alone: just then no one in the village was ill. She was very glad to see me, and kissed me as she had done upon the bridge.

"Oh, I am very happy, sir," said she, "now I am nobody's servant, but only the servant of all who have no one to take care of them. Sometimes—for example, to-day, I have only God to serve! and you, sir, if you like," she added gracefully, "for my other room is unoccupied, and the bed is very clean, so I hope you will consent to stay here for the night. We shall want neither eggs, nor honey, nor rye-bread, when it is known in the village that you are here. And then, the dog, how delighted he will be to see you again, for he knew you well as his poor master's friend; and when I tell him your name in play, he wags his tail as though he could see you in his mind's eye."

CXXXII.

I joyfully accepted Genevieve's hospitality, and all the neighbours, hearing that she had a gentleman in her house, brought much more than was necessary for the supper of a huntsman.

We supped together as we used to do at the vicar's table, talking of old times, and of what had happened to us during

the two years that had passed since we last saw each other. After supper she threw an armful of pine sticks on the fire, and we continued to talk of all sort of things until eleven o'clock at night, listening to the thunder that was rolling outside, and the rain rushing in torrents against the windows of the room.

CXXXIII.

Just as the clock struck eleven, three little knocks, by an evidently timid hand, at the door of the court-yard, interrupted the remarks I was going to make to her about her simple story, and the questions that I still intended to ask her. But although it was late, and the night very dark, Genevieve ran to open the door, without manifesting the least hesitation or alarm. I mechanically put my head out of the window that looked into the road to learn who it was that could be knocking at an isolated door, at such an hour, and I heard the following dialogue:—

“Open the door, for the grace of God, and let me remain for the night in your hay-loft or your stable.”

“Who are you?”

“A poor little tinker's boy, who has lost his road, and is going into the country to fetch his master's wife.”

I perceived by his voice that the speaker was a child of tender age, for his voice was as clear, gentle, and bell-like as that of a young girl.

“And where is your master?”

“At Voiron, ill in the hospital.”

“Come in, my poor little fellow!” said Genevieve; and I heard her draw back the bolt and turn the oaken door upon its creaking hinges.

She soon came up the staircase, and entered the kitchen accompanied by a boy about eight or nine years old, who was leaning upon a staff of white wood taller than himself, and bending under the weight of a large hempen bag, which was fastened on to his shoulders by two leather straps.

There had been a violent storm during the evening. The bag, the clothes, the white felt hat, and the long hair of the child, were all as wet as if he had just been pulled out of the well.

Genevieve threw some more sticks on the fire, and soon

made it burn up brightly, and then she cut a great slice of bread from the loaf, brought out the remnants of our supper from the pantry, and placed them, with a mug of wine, on the table for the boy. Whilst she was doing this, he had unfastened the straps, taken off his jacket, shaken the rain off his hat, and put his bag on a chair to dry before the fire.

CXXXIV.

I could not help looking with a smile at this little traveller, who was already able to traverse these wild mountains alone, although he would have been obliged to take two or three of his little steps in order to cross over one of the ant-hills which are so abundant among the pine-forests.

He had one of the most charming and most touching child's faces that I have ever seen in my life. The lids of his large black eyes cast a shade on his lower eye-lid similar to that artificial shade with which the women of the East increase the brilliancy of their eyes; his mouth was half open like that of all children who appear to have a long life to look forward to, and who as yet have nothing to retain in their hearts. His teeth were small, and as regularly arranged as pomegranate-seeds in their sockets of rosy flesh; the transparent nostrils of his little nose palpitated like the wings of a young bird which is trying to fly before it has any plumage; his forehead was rounded, very white just above the eyes, and marked with a red streak where the heavy hat had pressed upon his tender skin. His hair was dark, nearly black, long, undulating, and shining, but divided by the water, with which it had been saturated, into small damp tresses. With all this, there was in his look, his face, his movements, and his attitudes, a serious, reflective, and careful expression, that was beyond his years. I took pleasure in watching him take off his jacket, spread it over his knees to dry, empty his pockets, place his bag on a chair before the fire, put his stick away behind the door, and walk to and fro in the kitchen, taking care not to disturb anything, or to tread with his heavy-nailed shoes upon the paws of the cat or the dog. Genevieve contemplated him with no less attention, admiration, and astonishment than I did; she even seemed to watch him with a fixed and melancholy gaze,

as if his face and character had awakened some memory, or borne some resemblance to some one whom she had known in by-gone times, and whom it grieved her to think about.

CXXXV.

When the child had finished his supper, and thought that we were too busy talking together by the fire to take any notice of him, he came quietly and took his bag off the chair, carried it to the table, unfastened it, and displayed one by one before him on the cloth all the different articles it contained. He touched them, examined them, wiped them, and arranged them carefully to make sure that the rain had spoiled none of the treasures that he was carrying home to the wife and daughters of his master, the tinker.

There were wooden boxes on which large red and yellow flowers were painted, needles and pins done up in small packets of blue paper, children's toys, rosaries and necklaces of black and red beads, brass rings, and last of all a letter folded up in a piece of that thick grey paper which grocers use for wrapping up sugar. He looked at all these things, touched them, turned, dried, and polished them as well as a grown-up person could have done, and as though he felt in his precocious isolation the importance of the trust that had been confided to him by his master. He did not perceive, however, that both Genevieve and I were watching him attentively.

When he had finished his examination, he folded all the things up in their respective papers, arranged them all carefully in his bag, and tied it up strongly: then, taking his jacket off again, he opened his shirt of coarse linen, the roughness and colour of which only served to set off the fineness and delicate whiteness of his skin. He next took off from his neck a long horse-hair chain, at the end of which was suspended an object apparently much more precious and personal, for he laid it on the table, handled it more carefully, and examined it more attentively than he had done anything else. It was a large round tin box, like those in which pilgrims carry their relics, and sailors their papers.

The child, after having breathed upon it and polished it with his little hand, finished by opening it, doubtless with

the intention of making sure that the rain had not soaked through. He took out of it something that lay coiled up in the box, wrapped round with paper, and looking like a tame serpent lying asleep in the hand of an Arab snake-charmer. He unrolled it, took off the paper, and slowly exhibited to our eyes a long tress of dark chestnut hair, as fresh and undulating as if it had been just cut by the scissors of her mother or sister, from the head of a young girl sixteen years of age. At the sight of this lock of hair, Genevieve, who had risen from her chair and was standing quietly behind the boy, uttered a cry, snatched the hair from his hands, took it into her own, and tremblingly examined it by the lamp, gazed at it and touched it, growing paler every moment. At length she turned towards the child, and asked:

"Who gave you this hair?"

"The nun," replied the child.

"What nun?" inquired Genevieve.

"The nun at the hospital of Grenoble."

"You are then a child from the hospital?"

"Yes," said the boy, hanging down his head and blushing, as though he had already learned that there was shame attaching to his misfortune.

"And whose hair did she say it was?" added Genevieve, with such hurried words and such a beating heart, that she seemed about to choke, and the lock of hair trembled in her hands like a leaf in the wind.

"My mother's," answered the child.

"Your mother's," cried Genevieve; and she fell down fainting, with her arms round the boy's neck.

I perceived that some great and perhaps unsolvable mystery had been propounded to the poor woman's heart; but I said in her own language: "God is God, and what men call chance, angels call Providence."

CXXXVI.

Genevieve's fainting-fit lasted only for a few seconds, and she soon rose from the bench on to which she had sunk down, and throw her two arms round the child's neck, exclaiming: "Josette! Josette!" The child, alarmed at her cries and gestures, and unable to understand her emotion and violence,

thought that she wanted to deprive him of the letters, the box, and the chair that he had laid on the table; so he gathered them up under his two little hands, as if determined not to lose them without a struggle, and looked imploringly towards me, beseeching protection both with his voice and eyes. Genevieve, without perceiving the terror with which she had filled the child, continued to hold his head in both her hands, and alternately pressed him to her bosom and drew him towards the lamp to satisfy herself that her senses were labouring under no illusion, and that the features of the child which she was thus examining, and mentally comparing with those she had treasured up in her memory, were indeed the features of her poor sister. Every now and then she burst forth into rapid and disjointed exclamations addressed to her-self. "Is this her forehead, rather swelling on each side, and divided in the middle by that little indentation that my mother used to call the mark of my lips? Yes!" And then she kissed the smooth, white forehead of the boy at the very same place at which she had so often kissed Josette's. "Is this her nose, slightly turned up, with two pretty little transparent nostrils through which I used to be able to see the red light of our lamp of an evening? Oh yes! there is the same form and the same transparency!" And she pressed the boy once more to her bosom. "Is this her mouth, the two corners of which, buried in her cheeks, used to bend upwards when she was gay, and downwards when she was disposed to weep? Oh! yes, yes. Stop, it seems to me as though she were going to speak, and tell me my name." And she clasped her hands before the trembling lips of the boy. "Are those her eyes; as blue as the sky in winter? Is this her chin, with her pretty dimple? and her round, white, swan-like neck on to which her hair used to fall till it touched her shoulders? Oh! yes, yes!" And, while saying this, she delicately unfastened the child's necktie, and attentively examined every part of his small neck, kissing it all over! Then suddenly crying out more loudly, and turning towards me, with her finger pointed to something:

"Oh! look, sir, look!" she exclaimed, "there is everything alike, even to the spot that we used to call the *grain of beauty* which Josette had just at the place where her neck entered her breast as though the angels, when she came into

the world, had fastened a beautiful jet pin into her bosom! Look, sir! here it is, here it is! Who will tell me now that he is not her child!

While uttering these cries of surprise and joy, she opened the child's coarse linen shirt and showed me a large mole upon his neck. she kissed it with even more transport than that with which she had kissed his forehead, cheeks, and chin. This mole, situated at precisely the same place as on Josette's bosom, appeared to Genevieve to be a mark of recognition set by God upon the child now restored to her arms.

She now became more calm, and sat down on a chair, still keeping her eyes fixed upon the charming countenance of the little boy, and wiping away the tears that continually flowed from her eyes.

CXXXVII.

"Why did that lady undress me in this way, and what is she crying about?" said the poor trembling child turning towards me, for he plainly saw that Genevieve was sobbing too much to answer him.

"Because she knew your mother," I replied, "and you are so very much like her, that she thinks she beholds her again after her death and can embrace her in you."

"My mother?" said the little fellow, "she is not dead, thank God! On the contrary, she is quite well; she is much younger and much more rosy-cheeked than her; and then, everybody says that I am not at all like her, no more than a white lamb is like a black sheep! Her hair is like the chimney-plate and mine like the shoots of our vine! However," he added, counting on his fingers, "she may be right, for I have had one, two, three, and perhaps four mothers. It is said in the country that other boys have only one, and this is perhaps how the lady knows her."

CXXXVIII.

"So you have had two, three, four mothers?" exclaimed Genevieve, who had heard all he said, rising from her seat with a convulsive effort and looking at me with a triumphant air which seemed to say: "See if my eyes and my heart have deceived me!" "Well!" she added in a moment, turning to the

child, whom she again began to question with more calmness and in the same gentle voice; "who was your first mother? Come, tell us about her."

"Oh! the first," answered the boy, "I never saw her. They say that she lives in a country far, far above this, above the snows and the stars, to which we only go after death."

"Alas! yes," said Genevieve, who was drinking in all his words, "he speaks only too truly, his first mother is dead!"

"No! she is not dead," said the boy, "only she does not live in the same country that we do."

"Well! as you please, my child," said Genevieve; "but do you remember your second mother?"

"Yes, I remember her a little, but not much," answered the boy; "she was very wicked, and let me suffer from thirst and cold, but I do not even know her name."

"And your third mother, what of her?"

"Oh! the third," said he, joyously clapping his little hands together, "she is my best mother! she is my real mother! She is Lucie, the wife of my father the tinker. Oh! how much we all love her! She takes great care of me, and she cried very much when I left her at midsummer, after the fair, to go for the first time with my father on his journey through the country, and blow the bellows for him while he is mending kettles and saucepans in the villages."

"And where does your third mother live?" asked Genevieve.

"She lives a long way off, on the other side of *Echelles*, in a place called *Gros Soyer*, where there are five houses detached from one another, and each has an orchard and a meadow with walnut-trees and mountain-ashes, and ours are the best of all."

"But what is the name of the church there," said Genevieve.

"The church? oh! we call it the parish church," answered the boy, confidently.

"You don't know its other name, then?"

"No," said the child, "but I know my way there well, for when you have passed *Echelles*, you turn to the left, and walk along by the torrent for an hour, and then you turn to the right, and go up the mountain by the goat-path, and at sunset you arrive at the house of my father the tinker. If it

please God, and if you will give me, early to-morrow morning, a piece of bread to put in my pocket, I hope that I shall be at home in the evening, though I am only a little fellow! But, alas! how sorry my mother Luce will be when I tell her why I have come back all alone, and that my father has sent me to fetch her so that he may bid her good-bye before he departs to a land from which nobody ever returns!"

"Oh! you shall not go by yourself," cried Genevieve, kissing him again, "for I will go with you, or rather I will go instead of you, and you shall remain here. I will set out directly, while you are asleep; I will enquire at Echelles for the parish in which the hamlet of Gros Soyer is situated, and I will bring your mother here to-morrow evening, and you shall take her to Voiron to her husband, who, I hope, will not bid her good-bye for so long a time as you think, my poor boy."

Having said this, Genevieve began to put on her walking-shoes and to prepare for her journey. But I stopped her, and said:

"No, Genevieve, neither you nor the boy shall go. I will go and wake up some one of your good neighbours, who is well acquainted with the country; and I will pay him to go with his mule and fetch the tinker's wife from Gros Soyer. He shall bring her hither on his beast, and they will be here before the end of to-morrow. You must put the boy to bed now, for he is quite overcome with fatigue. At sunrise, you shall both mount my horse, which is very quiet, and I will lead him by the bridle. We will go to Voiron together; the boy shall conduct us to the house in which his father is lying ill, and I will send for the physician, who is a friend of mine. You shall nurse Luce's husband as you well know how; and his wife will soon be with him to console him if he must die, or to take him home again if he lives; and you will be able to converse with her, and clear up the mystery which the sight of this child has raised in your mind. Who knows, as Jocelyn used to say, but that the bird that falls out of its nest on to the door-step, will be the most fortunate of the brood?"

"You are right, sir," said Genevieve, taking off her shoes, and looking rather disappointed, for though she could not but perceive the justice of my observations, she nevertheless greatly regretted that she would have to put off for twenty-

four hours longer the conversation that she intended to have with Luce about this child, whom she already adored, but whom she feared to lose again. "You are right, I will go and wake old father Lacroche. He returned only the day before yesterday from Gresivaudan, so that his mule will be rested by this time."

CXXXIX.

In a few minutes the boy had been put to bed, father Lacroche woken up, a bargain made with him to go and fetch the tinker's wife from Gros Soyer, and his mule saddled with a pack-saddle, covered with a woollen cushion for the woman to sit on. Soon I heard the tinkling of the bells as the mule went off in the direction of Savoy.

I went to bed; but as for Genevieve, she was a prey to such a conflict of emotions, uncertainties and hopes, that she would not leave the kitchen in which the child was sleeping, but remained there all night, sitting up in her chair, with her eyes turned towards his bed, as though she were afraid that he would vanish while she slept. I verily believe that she heard the clock of the village church strike every hour that night.

CXL.

Before the beams of the morning sun had rendered the dark trunks of the fir-trees distinctly visible against the blue sky, Genevieve, who was afraid to call me, but very anxious that I should wake, made such a clattering with her wooden shoes upon the stone floor of the kitchen, that I understood her indirect appeal and arose from my bed, upon which I had thrown myself without undressing. I went at once to the stable of the little inn, where I had left my horse, and having saddled and bridled it, I borrowed a thick woollen covering to spread over the saddle. I made Genevieve mount, and placed the boy in front of her; I then took the bridle in one hand and my gun in the other, and we proceeded thus, sometimes silent, sometimes chatting, to Voiron, where we arrived before noon.

CXLJ.

We were guided by the child, who seemed to remember every stone and every house that we passed on our road, to a miserable inn in the suburbs of the town. We entered a large court-yard, full of country waggons, horses that were being curried, and all the tumult of an inn-yard; while from the surrounding tap-rooms we could hear the clinking of glasses and the cynical oaths of the waggouers. The child ran before us, and stopped in the right-hand corner of the yard, underneath a dark shed, from which a kind of staircase, or rather ladder of worn-eaten wood, led up to the room usually occupied by pedlars, knife-grinders, and tinkers, when they stopped for a night at Voiron. The child seemed very impatient to see his father again; but before mounting the ladder, he stopped, and, turning to Genevieve with an air of mystery which contrasted strangely with the open simplicity of his countenance, he said in a low tone:—

“Please, ma’am, don’t speak before my father of what I told you about my three mothers; Luce does not wish him to hear it. She has often told me that she would leave me in the road if I mentioned it to her husband, because he must not know that I have had several mothers. She said that if I told him it would make her grieve, and she would have to scold me.”

Genevieve and I looked at one another, astonished at Luce’s precautions and the child’s prudence. We promised not to divulge his secrets, which he had been induced to tell us in answer to our questions the evening before, and followed him up the stairs.

CXLII.

When we had got to the top of the ladder we found, in a species of garret constructed of deal-boards badly joined together, a large room partitioned off from the hayloft, and furnished with six beds and a few chairs. The door alone admitted the fresh air into this apartment, which was rendered almost stifling by the acrid vapours from the stable beneath. The room was lighted by a single candle, stuck into a waggoner’s lantern, and suspended by a string from the roof. The beds were all empty, except the one that

stood nearest the partition-wall. By the light of the lantern we could discern the form of a body beneath the coverlid, and the pale face of the poor invalid upon the pillow.

"Here I am, father," cried the boy, running to the bedside, and throwing his little arms round the dying man's neck.

"Oh! is it you?" answered he in a faint voice, and appearing to wake up from a feverish dream, "but where is Luce? could you not find your way home again?"

"Luce is coming to-morrow on a mule, with a man from Valneige, who was sent to fetch her by a gentleman and lady who are very kind to poor people, and who brought me back on a beautiful horse to Voiron, to take care of you."

Then the child briefly related to the invalid all that had happened to him on the preceding evening at the hospital of Valneige, without, however, mentioning the discovery of the hair, and his resemblance to Genevieve's sister. Then he beckoned to Genevieve and me to draw near the bed, and said:—

"Here are the lady and gentleman."

The invalid tried to support himself upon his enfeebled elbows, while he expressed his gratitude and astonishment at the kindness which we, though perfect strangers, had shown to the wife and child of a poor man like him. We forbade him to utter a word of thanks until he had recovered his health. Genevieve, after giving the boy some food, set to work to sweep and wash the room, to light a little fire in the grate, to prepare some broth, and to change the sheets of the bed, with so gentle and practised a hand, that he did not suffer at all by the removal; the boy assisted her with a zeal and intelligence beyond his age. I went down to the bar-room of the inn, and paid the host the rent of all the beds in his garret, so that no stranger might be put to sleep in the room until the poor tinker had either died or recovered. I said that he was one of the retainers of my family, and that I took a particular interest in him. I also gave the stable-boy a present to induce him to prevent, as much as possible all noise and shouting in the shed; and then I went to see a young physician, who had been a college friend of mine. He was an excellent man, whose heart entered more largely than his learning into his practice; but it was this which gave me

confidence in his skill, for medicine, in my opinion, is rather an intention than an art of healing. The knowledge of a doctor can supply him only with axioms, but his heart supplies him with divinations! The desire to relieve is of itself a soothing power. A physician should be kind-hearted, for therein consists more than half his talent.

I found him just returning from his visit to the hospital; he accompanied me to the inn and felt the invalid's pulse. In his presence he affected an appearance of satisfaction and confidence, which he exhibited both in words and looks. He knew that hope is a great vital force, and that life must be encouraged, especially when struggling with death. He directed Genevieve, whom he knew, to adopt a simple, gentle, and cordial treatment, most suitable to those whose maladies are as simple as their occupations.

After having thus inspirited his patient, and consoled the child, who kept looking in the doctor's face as intently as angels would look at the face of a prophet, he took Genevieve and myself apart, at the head of the staircase, and said to us with an expression of doubt and disquietude:—

"It is a pleurisy of five days' standing; the ninth will decide his fate. The case is serious, but not desperate. Potions, perspiration, and peace of mind, are all that must be attended to. I will come two or three times a-day to give Genevieve directions. She can do for him more than I can. I am only the eye which sees the evil, while she is the hand which touches and combats it at every moment."

Genevieve returned to her post by the bedside: the child employed himself in cleaning his father's tools and mending his bellows in the court-yard, at the foot of the stairs, running up every now and then to see if Genevieve wanted him, and taking off his shoes so as to make no noise. I took a room in the inn opposite the shed; and from my window I could watch the proceedings of Genevieve and the boy on the stairs. Whenever she left the sick-room to get a mouthful of fresh air, or to fetch something from the kitchen of the inn, the poor woman would pass her hand through the beautiful hair of the child, drawing it through her hand as if it had been silk, and would kiss him on the forehead, thinking that no one saw her.

CXLIII.

Thirty-six hours passed without effecting any change in the condition of the invalid. On the ninth day after the appearance of the disease, the physician left him with a gesture of discouragement.

"A miracle only can save him now," said he, as he went down the stairs, "and nature is not fond of working miracles. If I find him no better this evening, it will be time for the poor young man to think of making his will."

I walked a few steps along the street with my friend, and returned grieved at his prognostication, both on account of Genevieve and the child.

Scarcely had I re-entered the court-yard of the inn, when I heard the tinkling of the bells of a mountain mule behind me. I turned round and saw an active old man, with a long staff in his hand, leading by the bridle a mule, upon which was mounted a young peasant woman about twenty-six years of age. Genevieve had heard the bells before I did, and had guessed that father Lacroche was arrived. She was already half-way down the stairs, running as fast as she could after the child, who, while she was greeting the old man, had cast himself in a flood of tears into his mother's arms.

CXLIV.

It was one of the charming heads of Greuze, that painter who, born in a cottage, has, next to Raphael, best succeeded in delineating the rustic Venus, the sylvan beauty, simplicity, grace, and candour of the countenances of young village girls and children. Greuze's brother was the curate of one of my grandfather's parishes; and when the peasant-Raphael came to spend a few summer-days with his family, the curate used to bring the painter to the manor-house. When he took his departure, he always left my grandfather some little sketch, such as a head, a figure, or a group, sketched upon a strip of canvas. After his departure, these trifles, as he called them, were carefully framed; and they were the first pictures upon which my eyes rested when a child. From them, I think, I acquired my taste for village beauty—a beauty which is pleasing to the eye, which does not dazzle but touches you,

and the uniform and peaceful expression of which recalls to your mind the penetrating melancholy of those simple notes, with which the shepherds' flutes are continually making our woodland valleys resound.

CXLV.

Such was the face of Luce, the tinker's young wife. The periwinkles that grew in the shade, beside the spring, were not of a paler and more shadowy blue than her eyes. Her features were calm, and seemed never to have been agitated by passion; her mouth, even in the anxiety and grief which had made her lips pale and palpitating, had that tender expression and that sweet smile which, so to speak, are sculptured on the always half-open mouths of young peasant-girls. Her beautiful pearly teeth were as regular as those of a lamb. A round hat, with a broad-brim, edged with black velvet, covered her white cap, from beneath which issued a few tresses of black hair. A kerchief of red wool was crossed over her breast, and a very short gown of green cloth, grey stockings, and thick nailed shoes, ornamented with silver buckles, completed her costume.

CXLVI.

No sooner had she kissed the boy, whom she lifted up to her face with her vigorous arms as easily as if he had been an infant eighteen months old, than she walked up the stairs with him still hanging round her neck. The boy showed her the door, and then the bed; she walked up to it very gently, and falling on her knees by its side, she encircled the sick man's body with her right arm, and repeatedly kissed his damp forehead, while with her left she pressed the boy to her bosom. Genevieve and I had followed her, without her having taken much notice of us, and in silence and sorrow, we witnessed this mournful meeting.

"O my Jean!" she said, "do you recognize me?"

The invalid only answered by pressing her hand with all his remaining strength, and turning towards her his brimming eyes. She wiped her tears away with her fingers, and then kissed his eyes, as though anxious to devour the impotent expression of tenderness which still rested on them.

"Oh! you do recognize me! Well, that is right," she said; "I will take good care that you shall not die, since your heart still speaks to you on my behalf; for what would become of me without you,—of me who have no father, or mother, or brother in the world? Who would cut the wood for me? Who would mow the field? Who would work during the winter, so as to bring home food and money in the summer-time? And who would bring up the child, and teach him a trade? And who would love your poor Luce so much?"

And so she went on, enumerating a hundred reasons why he ought not to die, as though she had believed that dying was an act of volition and discouragement on his part, and that his illness was a whim which could be driven out of him by good reasons.

But the poor invalid, who had been roused from his lethargy for a moment by the voice and embrace of his wife, now had ceased to hear her. His eyes were closed, his breath came painfully, his inarticulate mutterings announced that he was dreaming. His wife hid her face in the coverlet, looking up every now and then at her husband with an expression of the deepest sorrow. The boy sought to console her by telling her of Genevieve, whose care had preserved his life hitherto, of the physician who came to see him two or three times a-day, as if he were a gentleman, and of one who had brought Genevieve and himself back to his father, and taken care that they should want for nothing.

CXLVII.

These words appeared to revive hope and courage in the poor woman's heart. She then appeared to perceive for the first time that she was not alone in the room with her son and the sick man. She timidly approached Genevieve, with whose name and character she was acquainted by the accounts which father Laclache had given her on the road, of the services which she had rendered to the people of Valneige. "I thank you very much," she said, taking her hand. "I am told that you have very kindly taken my place by the side of my poor Jean, so that if he recovers from his illness, it will be to you that I shall owe his safety in this

world. What can I possibly do to show my gratitude to you, ma'am? Alas! I have nothing to give you?"

"Who knows? my good woman," replied Genevieve. "Perhaps, if God restores your husband to life, you will be able to give me as much as I have given you."

While speaking thus, she was thinking of the child; but Luce could not understand her,

"And you, sir," said Luce, turning towards me, "what can we ever do to thank you for the kindness you have shown to such poor people as us?"

"The heart is the money of those who have no other wealth," I replied with a smile, by which I was anxious to conceal my anxiety about her husband; "and, as the Bible says, it is the best money. I shall be amply rewarded for all I have done, if God restores your husband to you."

CXLVIII.

But, alas! Providence did not seem willing to grant our prayers for Jean's restoration to health. On the evening of the ninth day he was in agony. A priest was called in to bless his departure from earth. The physician had just in vain administered potent cordials to prop up his declining strength. He then drew near to Genevieve and Luce, who were weeping together at the foot of the bed, Luce on account of her husband, and Genevieve for the sake of Luce, whom she already loved as a sister.

"You must send a messenger for the notary," he said to the two women in a low voice; "if he cannot write, he has left no will at home, and he must make one now."

Jean, like all the mountaineers, had, in addition to his business and his tools, a little property, consisting of his cottage, his garden, a little copse on the hill-side, and one or two meadows and an orchard in the valley. He was so young that he had never thought about leaving this to any one. He imagined that his little patrimony would naturally pass to his wife and child; so he had never troubled himself to make a will. However, when the physician had explained to him that the child would have it all when he was twenty-one years of age, and that his poor Luce would be, perhaps, at the mercy of a daughter-in-law in her own home,

he consented to let us send for a notary and witnesses, that he might divide his property between his wife and child. I was ready to bear testimony to this last act which unites the dead to the living by inheritance. The notary lived only two doors off from the inn. Jean, as he was now near his last moments, had recovered his intellect, and was perfectly lucid.

CXLIX.

He dictated the following words to the notary as his last will and testament :

"I bequeath the enjoyment of my property at Grès Soyer to Luce, my wife, and, after her death to my son."

"Is that all?" said the notary to the dying man.

"Yes," he replied. "As my wife is such a good mother she will take care of the child during her lifetime, and when she dies, he will find it just as I have left it. Is it not so, Luce?" said he, looking at his wife ; "does not that arrangement please you?"

Luce did not answer, but turned towards the wall with a gesture of despair which did not seem to me compatible with the habitual gentleness of her character, and the melancholy calmness of her attitude. Indeed, ever since mention had been made of a notary and a will, and the public officer had entered the room with the witnesses, she had seemed a prey to an agitation which had not merely the appearance of grief, but also exhibited all the symptoms of anguish and convulsion of soul.

"Well ! gentlemen, let us sign," said the notary, when he had enveloped this short will with the usual formalities.

I stepped forward to sign amid the most profound silence. I had taken the pen into my hand and had already written the first few letters of my christian name, when a terrible cry made me drop the pen.

"Stay, sir, stay ! do not sign," cried Luce, turning round suddenly with uplifted hands and excited countenance towards her husband, falling down convulsively upon her knees before the bed, and beating her breast with her hand, like a person confessing, and punishing herself for, a crime. "Stay, sir, I am a miserable wretch. I am not worthy of so good a husband as God gave me in my Jean ! I have deceived

him ! I have lied to him for eight years so as not to give him pain, and I was going to let him tell another unconscious lie upon his death-bed, to prevent him from disinheriting a child whom I love too much."

"A child whom you love too much, Luce?" said her husband, surprised at her cries and gestures. And why do you love our little boy too much? Is he not thine as well as mine?"

"Oh! pardon me, pardon me, my poor Jean!" said Luce, taking his cold hands within hers and pressing them against her forehead, as though anxious to hide her face within the shadows of death. "No! he is not mine! No! he is not thine! Our child died at two months old! I did not wish to grieve you on your return by telling you so; I have lied, I have lied! first out of love to you, and then out of love for the child! But I will not lie to God in the presence of death, nor burden my conscience by the robbery that I should commit against our relations by allowing you to leave all your property to a child that is not ours! This will would be a theft, Jean! Now, Mr. Notary, write what he will tell you!"

Luce, having disburthened her conscience by this avowal, awaited, as if thunderstruck, the reply of her husband.

"Well!" said Jean, after a long interval of silence, during which he seemed to be painfully collecting together in his memory the entangled thread of his thoughts, "you only deceived me to secure my tranquillity, my dear wife; and I pardon and bless thee for thy falsehood on my death-bed, Luce! I loved this little fellow as if he had been mine and thine; but I must not rob my relations. Write, Mr. Notary, that I leave my property to my wife, and after her to my nearest relations."

The notary wrote this, the witnesses signed it and retired. The sick man, exhausted by his emotion, relapsed into the delirious sleep from which the arrival of the notary had for a moment roused him.

Luce was taken ill of a slight fever, in consequence of the mental suffering she had endured, and put to bed in the same room with her husband. Genevieve had now two patients to attend to instead of one. But she was equal to her task, passing from Jean's bed to that on which Luce lay,

and assisted by the child, who hourly grew more attached to her for the tenderness with which she watched over Luce and Jean. He had not at all understood the scene that had taken place at the signing of the will. If he had been told a thousand times over that Luce and Jean were not his mother and father, his heart would have always told him more strongly that he was their child.

CL.

Three days passed thus, and no great change was perceptible in the condition of the poor tinker. His wife, relieved from the burden which had weighed down her conscience, speedily recovered. The long duration of his disease began to inspire her with the hope of beholding her husband restored by God to her love. The physician himself thought the symptoms more favourable. In the room inhabited by the four poor people, hours passed in silence and calm, which was disturbed only by the more gentle and regular breathing of the sleeping Jean. The two women, who now never left each other, then would sit talking together in a low tone by the window; while the child played or worked with Jean's tools on the stairs. Genevieve had gained ground rapidly in Luce's confidence and affection. Ever since the young wife had uttered the cry of conscience in the presence of the notary, Genevieve seemed to love her better. She never let her for a moment out of her sight, but watched her as people watch a treasure or a mystery which they fear will disappear with the person who is the depository of it, and who would carry off all if he disappeared. Luce was not slow to return her love. In their simple hearts, friendship was not hedged about by that prudence and reserve which render it slow of growth and suspicious among those classes whose feelings are more complicated. Nature does not reflect but feels; and these two women soon loved each other sincerely and unreservedly.

CLI.

One evening, Jean, now almost convalescent, was sleeping peacefully on his couch, which was lighted up by a ray of the setting sun. I congratulated Genevieve and Luce upon the

miracle which had been worked by God and nature in answer to their prayers and care. Genevieve had not for a moment lost sight of her desire to unveil the mystery of the origin of the child, which had now been partially made known. She was sitting down by Luce's side, on the edge of one of the beds that were furthest from the invalid; and I took a seat upon another, opposite the two women. Genevieve's eyes besought me to speak to Luce. I understood her; and brought the conversation to that serious and tender tone of intimacy which is produced by happiness felt in common by all. Happiness opens the heart, and pours forth every secret together with the sweet tears of joy.

"You only told us a few words in presence of the witnesses," said I to Luce, "on a subject which it cost you a great struggle to mention, when you avowed to your husband that you had deceived him for seven years by making him believe that the child whom you appear to love so much was your own; but now that Jean is getting well, and you will have to tell him all, at your leisure and without fear, relate to Genevieve and myself by what concurrence of circumstances and feelings you, who seem to be so frank and conscientious, could be induced to impose so greatly upon the husband whom you love so tenderly."

"I will do so," she answered; "I will do penance for the fault I have committed, by the shame that I shall feel at confessing all to Genevieve."

Genevieve, with a countenance expressive of the most profound attention, listened with all her ears, in the hope of finding in the narrative the confirmation of his views about the child, and some additional proofs of his origin.

CLII.

"When I married Jean I was sixteen years old," said Luce; "neither of us knew when it was that we began courting, for we were both brought up together in his mother's cottage. We were both lambs of the same flock. His father was a tinker like he is, and penny by penny he had gained his little domain among the mountains. His mother gained her livelihood by taking children from the foundling hospital and suckling them for so much a month;

After which, when they were old enough to go to work she placed them in service, and received a little pay for their labour. I myself am one of those poor abandoned children who were nourished and brought up by her. Doubtless it was this which afterwards led me to conceal my fault. We love those who bear the same despised name as ourselves. However, when I was grown up, Jean's mother, who loved me more than she had done the others, because my complexion was fairer, and my constitution more delicate, and because I had given her more trouble, would not separate from me. She treated me just as if I had been her own daughter, and brought me up with Jean, who was only four years older than myself. It was said also that I was the child of a lady at Geneva, or Chambery, who could not acknowledge me, but who used every year to send my nurse little presents of money and clothes, to induce her to take more tender care of me. But this is all I know about my origin, excepting what Jean's mother said a little time before her death to a neighbour who found fault with her for having allowed her son to marry me: 'Say what you will of Luce, if the mayor can't give her a certificate of her birth, God can give her a famous one! If there is any disgrace in this marriage, it is not incurred by my poor boy.

CLIII.

"So I loved Jean without knowing it, and Jean loved me without suspecting that he did so; but the mother saw clearly how matters stood, so she said to us one day:

"'You love each other?'

"'Yes,' we both said with a blush, 'that is true.'

"'Well,' said his mother, 'you must get married.'

"We were very, very happy at this, for we had really loved each other ever since we were twelve years of age, without knowing how to define our feelings; and we were married, so that he and I might remain all alone, and all our lives, with Jean's mother, whose husband was dead, and who had no other children.

CLIV.

"Jean was away all the winter, and at home all the

summer. During his absence, I took care of his mother and the cows. We were very happy when he returned from the plains. We were a long time without having any children. At last, at the end of three years and a half, and one year only after his mother's death, I became pregnant. Jean fetched a nurse from a long distance, and left her with me to take care of me in his absence: I was confined while my husband was away in Savoy. Oh! what a fine child it was, as I nursed it all alone in the house after the nurse was gone, and what pleasure I expected to have at showing it to Jean, who was so desirous to have a boy to help him in his business, and to go his rounds instead of him, when he wished to stay at home during the winter with me.

CLV.

"I must tell you, sir, that the domain which we call Gros Soyer, is situated very high up in the mountains, and very far from any other parish. The house stands by itself, on the brink of a large ravine, through which a torrent flows which we can see sparkling here and there through the overhanging foliage. Fir-trees, mountain-ashes, holm oaks, and maples, grow along both sides of the ravine, and shoot up to a great height, in search of air and sunshine. Our grey broom-thatched roof is half hidden among their branches, except on the eastern side, where there is a little court-yard, with a wooden gallery, and a staircase of rough stones leading into the house. On this side we can see the sun until noon, while the birds sing and chirp among the shady trees behind the house. It is just like a little nest; so the neighbours, when I was a girl, used to call me the *wagtail*.

"When I speak of neighbours, sir, I mean those who live on the same mountain as we do, in the scattered hamlets about Gros Soyer. None of these hamlets consist of more than seven or eight dwellings, very far from one another, and more closely resembling wood-cutters' huts than real houses. They are inhabited by the poor people who come up from the lower parishes when they have no property of their own, and clear an acre or two of brushwood, and build themselves a barn and dwelling-house with the rough grey stones that they find in the fields. The men go in the

summer-time to harvest in the plains, in the autumn to gather the crop of grapes for the vine-dressers, in the winter to thresh the corn in the barns; some of them know how to make shoes, others are smugglers between Savoy and France, and others, like my husband, go to patch leaky saucepans and kettles, and mend broken plates and dishes with small iron rivets. The women remain nearly all the year alone in the house, or in the fields. They nearly all have a child from the foundling hospital, because that ekes out their livelihood, and it is said that the air is wholesome among the heather and broom.

CLVI.

"Now, our nearest neighbour was a rather old woman whose husband was a smuggler who had been taken prisoner in a skirmish with the excisemen, and condemned to the galleys for twelve years, five of which had expired. Her name was Mother Maraude, or, rather, this was the nickname given her on account of the occupation of her husband, whom she frequently used to accompany on his expeditions to the frontier. She lived alone with two goats and a few sheep, with whose milk she used to feed her sucklings, for she impudently declared at the hospital that she had milk, although her sons had all long ago reached the age for military service; and when she could not get any children from the hospital, she obtained them from other nurses, by offering to take them at a reduction. This is the way she gained her living, and also by prowling, night and day, about the orchards to steal pears, walnuts, and sorbs, which she afterwards took for sale to the villages below.

"Oh! she was by far the most cruel and inhuman woman in the whole country. People used to say that they would not even be her donkey or her goat, for she used to beat all God's creatures, and especially the poor children, to prevent their crying of hunger.

"Her low house is quite concealed beneath an overhanging rock. You go down from the rock on to the roof, and from the roof into the courtyard. It is the nearest house to ours. At the end of our great heath, upon which my husband's father planted an orchard, there is a large winter-pear tree, which sheds its leaves partly into our orchard, and partly

into Mother Maraude's court-yard. It is fully two hundred years old, and in good years it yields more than four panniers full of fine pears, as red as the leaves of a cherry-tree after the autumn frost. But, alas! we never had more than the pleasure of seeing them grow and ripen upon the tree; for as soon as they were ripe, mother Maraude gathered her half, and the next night, according to her, the wind or the crows worked so hard, that very little fruit was left on our side. But we used to see the leaves and twigs scattered upon the grass, just as if the wind and the birds had had slings and poles to beat the tree with. It was very manifest to us that Mother Maraude had done their work for them, and the robbery of this unfortunate pear-tree, which continually gave us large hopes and scarcely ever a hatfull of fruit, was every year, between Mother Maraude and us, the cause of disputes which rendered intercourse unpleasant, and made us say angry words to our bad neighbour. I was always afraid that Jean would give her a beating, and Jean was afraid that she would set fire to our poor broom-thatch some night.

CLVII.

"Well, sir, you will not perhaps believe that what gave me most sorrow at having this bad neighbour so near us, who were fond of peace, was not so much at seeing the pear-tree robbed, and the other trees of the orchard visited by turns during the night, as hearing all day long the cries of the poor little babies that she brought up in her garret, just as if they had been so many kids in a stable. Their groans and cries used to make my heart tremble within me. I could neither work nor sew in pleasure while I felt that these innocent little creatures were suffering around me.

"But you will ask me: What have Mother Maraude and her babies to do with your story? You will soon understand why I have told you so much about them; and I do not say it in scandal. Besides the wicked woman is dead, and I hope that God will pardon her the cries of her children as readily as Jean and I pardon her for having stolen our pears.

CLVIII.

"I have told you, Miss Genevieve, that I had been confined with a fine boy, but with a rather delicate skin like myself, and that as the nurse had returned to her own village, I was all alone in the house suckling my three-months old baby, waiting for the return of my husband, and picturing his pleasure at the sight of his son. The child grew so fast that it was a blessing to see him; and I used to spend half the day with him in the orchard, tossing him up in my arms, and throwing him backwards and forwards, as if he had been in a swing.

"Often, in these walks through the orchard, I used to go as far as the pear-tree, and from thence I could hear the cries and lamentations of a pretty little baby, four months old, that Mother Maraude had brought back, not long before, from the town, under the pretence of suckling it. The wicked, lying woman! she only used to let it suck the udder of her goat, when the kids had had enough.

"Moreover, she used to be away whole days on business, or out harvesting, with her donkey or her sickle; going out in the morning, not returning until sunset, and leaving, for all those hours, the poor child in its cradle on the door step, guarded by the dog and the pig. Even the goat was more humane than the woman, for it used to come in sometimes and give the baby suck; but all the rest of the day, it lay there alone sleeping, or crying most piteously. There is nothing so heart-rending, sir, as this continued and desperate lamentation of a voice weeping alone, in the solitude of a house, unheard by any one!

CLIX.

"But, sir, I used to hear it so frequently and so loudly, that, at last, I could endure it no longer. I thought to myself: 'Good heavens! if it were mine, I should be very thankful if a compassionate neighbour would give it a little of that sustenance for which it is crying, or even only smile on it, and gladden its poor eyes a little!'

"Accordingly, one afternoon, when Mother Maraude was away from home, and the child was crying even more pite-

ously than usual, I took my own sleeping baby in my arms, walked all tremblingly to the pear-tree, descended from the rock into the court-yard, and ran bare-footed to comfort the poor child.

"Oh! what a beautiful child it was. But stop, you can now see him yourselves, for it was my little Bastien there; he has grown very much, but he still has the same pretty feminine face, and the same hair, though both are rather browned by the smoke of the tinker's rosin.

"He had disengaged his arms to drive away the flies that grievously tormented him; and when he saw me, he stretched them towards me to beseech me to take him. He smiled at my baby, and spluttered so, that you would have said he was trying to speak. This touched my heart, sir; so I laid my own baby in the cradle, and taking him in my arms, I played with him, until at last, unable to resist the influence which his pretty, intelligent face had upon me, I opened my dress, and gave him the breast as long as he liked. If you had seen him, Genevieve, you would have wondered at his transports, his joy, and his intoxication! Such clappings of his little hands, such kickings of his pretty naked feet against my bosom! I thought that he would drink me dry; but, in truth, I was so much delighted at seeing his wants supplied for once in his life, that I did not think of saving any for my own! But God is merciful, as Jean says; where there is enough for one there is enough for two!

"When he had satisfied himself, I put him back into his cradle, and carried both the babies into the shade under the pear-tree, and there I stayed until sunset, sometimes letting them sleep, and sometimes making them play together. Then I put him back in the place where I had found him, on Mother Maraude's door-step, and ran home as quietly as I could, for I heard the jingle of her donkey's bells coming along the path at the bottom of the ravine.

"Oh! what a pleasant day I had passed, and how contentedly I slept that night! I had not done wrong, I think; although I had no right to go into my neighbour's court-yard without her leave."

"Oh! no," said Genevieve, "I do not think you did wrong."

CLX.

"Well, this went on every day, and two or three times a day, for two months. You should have seen how the child grow! You might have said that the fairies visited him in his sleep.

"As for me, my poor Genevieve, it seemed as if I had two children instead of one, and my heart was divided between my own child and the foundling. I had always been told that a child became grafted on its wet-nurse, just as shoots of other trees are grafted on the crabs in our orchard, but I had never believed it. Ah! now I knew it was so; when I felt at my breast the pretty rosy mouth of the poor little neglected one, I used to say to myself, 'The life which he is thus imbibing, and which will increase with his childish growth, is my life!' Indeed, I looked upon this little creature almost as lovingly as if he had been my own child. You may be sure, Genevieve, that when you have suckled a child for six or eight weeks, you feel as much related to it as if you were really its mother!

"I felt all a mother's affection for this little child, and when I awoke in the night, and heard the wind whistling through the trees, or the water gurgling and murmuring in the ravine below the house, it seemed to me always that I heard him crying and calling me. I used to count the hours until Mother Maraude started on her donkey for the plains, so that I might go and revisit, caress, cradle, and suckle the child that had been committed to her charge.

CLXI.

"Alas! it was this that ruined me. I felt too much attachment to that little creature, and God punished me for it. I am now going to tell you what I never told to any one before, but Mother Maraude. She is dead, so I could easily keep my secret if I pleased, but I prefer to tell you all, and relieve my conscience at once.

"On a beautiful spring morning,—oh! a very unhappy morning, believe me, Genevieve! I had gone to play with my two little ones on the rock covered with moss, primroses, and flowering broom, which, as I have already told you, over-

hangs the court-yard of Mother Maraude's house. I was sitting with my feet hanging over the edge of the precipice, but that gave me no alarm, for we who are born on the brink of these abysses, are like the ferns which grow suspended by their roots from the declivities, and take no heed of them at all. I had put the two children together on my lap to play in the sunshine. It amused me to watch them. They kissed and cuddled each other; they pushed and pulled each other backwards and forwards, they looked and laughed at each other like two white kids, and I tickled their foreheads, and necks, and hands, to encourage them to play.

CLXII.

"Just at the moment when I was thinking of nothing, that one of Mother Maraude's goats which used to suckle the baby, apparently jealous of being deprived of its foster child, escaped suddenly from the wall of the courtyard on to the rock, and butted with her horns against my breast. I hastily raised my hands to screen my face from her attack, my knees opened before I could think of what I was about, and the two little ones rolled out of my lap over the rock, at first very slowly, like two bundles of hay carried away by the wind, then faster and faster, from fern to fern, from bush to bush, to the bottom of the ravine, where there was a pool of water. I leaped to my feet, shrieked in terror, raised my hands to heaven, bent my head over the precipice to look to the bottom, besought all the angels in heaven miraculously to interpose a bush, a root, a stone, to save my two darlings from the watery grave which awaited them at the bottom. I crept down as fast as I could on my hands and knees in the hope of getting to the bottom before they did, and arresting their fall. Alas! I was too late. I heard one fall into the water like a heavy stone; but the foliage prevented me from seeing which it was. Is it mine? is it the other? is it the true child or the false? I fainted, overcome by this fearful doubt, and rolled to the bottom. The chilliness of the water awoke me in the hollow bed of the stream, by the side of my poor little boy!—of mine, I say! He no longer breathed! he had been drowned in a minute!

"And the other, Mother Maraude's child, was before me,

stretching out his arms, looking and laughing at me, the poor innocent! unconscious of what had happened, as he lay with his feet caught in an ivy bush, like a bird with its leg fast in a trap.

"Oh! Miss Genevieve," said Luce, at this part of her tale, taking up her apron in her hands, and covering her face with it, "excuse me telling you more about this. My cries and tears during the whole of that day would have moved the rock if it had had a heart. Let it suffice you to know that Jean's and my child was dead, and that the foundling was alive. Poor little Moses, saved by the bulrushes like the one I read of in Jean's bible!

"I could but listen to his cries, as he was alive, and in want of nourishment; so I gave it to him. And I loved him still, in spite of the misfortune of which he had been the cause; but was it his fault or mine? . . .

CLXIII.

"I got two of the neighbours' children to carry my poor drowned baby to the parish: no one besides myself ever knew how he came to die; in our villages no more attention is paid to the death of an infant four months old, than to that of a fly. They are buried in the cemetery without their names even being always known.

"I remained alone in the house with Jean's empty bed and the child's empty cradle. Oh! how long the days seemed then, and how endless the nights!

CLXIV.

"And then, I said to myself: 'Poor Jean! who thinks that at his return he will find the child he so much longed for in my arms! What will he say? He will think that it is my fault! Perhaps he will love me no more at all when he sees me with empty hands! And then! Mother Maraude's poor little child; if I leave off suckling it, my milk will be wasted. I loved it so much next my own! How shall I console myself for the loss of two, when I can scarcely bear up under

the loss of one? And, in spite of my grief, I continued to go secretly, day after day, to suckle and caress the poor child.

* CLXV.

"The time for Jean's return home now drew near, and an idea came into my head, which haunted me like an unpleasant dream. This dream at last obtained such an ascendancy over me that I became almost mad about it, and could not think of anything else. Indeed, my madness inspired me with a courage and boldness that I have never felt in my life either before or since. I resolved to satisfy myself, cost what it might; and this is what I did.

'I went one evening to Mother Maraude, and said to her: "Sell me your nursling, for mine is dead! I have plenty of milk, and I will take good care of him; I will say nothing to Jean, and he will think the child is his. You must keep silence on the subject, and I will take care that the children who took my baby to be buried shall say nothing about it. The parish is distant, and the curate is dead. No one will come to tell Jean of his dead child, or if they do, it will be too late, for he will have become fond of the substitute, and will be no more willing than I shall be to cast him off.'

"'All this is possible,' said my neighbour, 'money can do everything. What will you give me for my child? and what will you give me for my silence?'

"We sat down together in the court-yard to talk the matter over, and the bargain was concluded thus:

"I promised to let her have the five shillings a-month that were allowed her by the hospital, and also the baby-linen, as if she had really continued to feed and clothe the foundling; and it was agreed that I should lend her the child to show it to the sisters at the hospital, whenever they asked to see it; and that, to pay her for her silence, I would give her every year all the fruit of the pear-tree which grew in our orchard, near her house, and which hitherto had so greatly excited her desires as to induce her to commit many improper actions in order to obtain the pears; and this arrangement was to last as long as she should say nothing to Jean or to any one else about the matter.

"As soon as the bargain was struck, I undressed the child,

and carried him home with me, leaving her the cradle and the linen. I felt that I was doing wrong, and yet I returned to my house more pleased than if I had discovered a hidden treasure. I could never have thought that stolen goods gave so much satisfaction; but what delighted me most was the grief that I should thus save my dear Jean from feeling.

CLXVI.

"Everything came to pass as I had imagined. Jean, at his return, seeing me with a fine child at my breast, did not suspect anything, but loved the little one as he would have loved his own child. The head has eyes, you know, Genevieve, but the heart has none. It loves everything that is willing to be loved, without asking its name or baptismal register. Things have gone on thus for nine years. God has not given me another child. My husband has taught Bastien his business, and last year he began to take him with him on his journeys, to light the fire and blow the bellows.

"Now, what would you have had me do, when I saw that poor Jean was being deceived even in the article of death, and that he was going to disinherit his real relations, and give his house and land to a stranger? I was obliged either to avow what I had done, or appear one day before God as a robber of other persons' property. Oh! no; I could not do that: I might deceive a man's heart for his own good; but deprive a poor family for ever of its rightful property, that I could never do! What would you have done, if you had been in my place, Miss Genevieve?"

"Oh!" said Genevieve, looking at the child, "I should have acted as you have done. I feel that I should have stolen the child, but restored the inheritance. But never mind about that," she continued, leading Luce aside, and speaking in a low tone; "if you were told to whom the child really belongs, would you restore him as you have restored the property to Jean's family!"

"Oh!" said Luce, raising her hands towards heaven, "I would try to do so; but I should not be the mistress in that case. I can restore the child to its relations, but I cannot restore his heart."

Genevieve, still possessed with the idea of fathoming the

mystery of the child's origin, and of finding in Bastien the son of her sister Josette, led Luce aside into the court-yard, sat down with her on the last step of the stairs, asked the child for the lock of hair and other treasures, that he kept in the tin box that hung around his neck, placed them on Luce's knees, and begging her to listen attentively, related to her the whole history of herself and her sister, striving, as far as I could gather from the gestures of the two women, to convince Luce of the right which she had by relationship to the possession of the child. Luce made no answer, but seemed at once convinced and silenced by Genevieve's reasoning. At last, the two women went up the stairs again, with that attitude of undecided reflection, and that uncertain gait which is a certain proof of a conversation that has entirely agitated two souls, but led to no satisfactory conclusion.

CLXVII.

I had, partly for want of other occupation, partly through heartfelt interest, watched the conversation of the two women in the court-yard. Seated in my room, by the window, I sometimes read and sometimes looked to see what was passing below. This drama became hourly more complicated. Luce took stealthy glances every now and then at the child, considering him as no longer a secure possession.

Some new comers had arrived, to give still further development to the little drama which was going on in the hearts of these two good women. My friend, the physician, suddenly entered my room. He had the radiant countenance of a man who foresees some unexpected occurrence, and enjoys beforehand the pleasing news he has come to announce.

"Your invalid is nearly well," he said to me, with a smile; "but I fear that his poor young wife will have to mingle some tears of sorrow with the tears of joy that she is shedding at the miraculous preservation of her husband; and I have fears also for Genevieve's eyes."

"Why so?" said I, in astonishment.

"Listen," said he, taking a seat, "there is some news from the hospital which I have to visit every morning. The superior, a woman of the most gentle virtue and affectionate devotion to the unfortunate, requested me to come into her

parlour, after I had gone my rounds, to have some conversation about a mysterious exposure of a child, which took place nearly nine years ago, and the traces of which the magistracy, most barbarous and heathenish in these matters, was anxious to destroy, so as to disappoint the tenderness of the illegitimate mother. The family of the child's father are now extremely anxious to discover him. A sister of Genevieve, a most charming girl, who is celebrated here for her beauty and her early death, is mixed up, it is said, with all this. A pious lady, of advanced age, and from another part of the country, has been staying in a private apartment at the hospital for the last five weeks, employed in making researches with regard to the exposure of this child, so that she may discover if he still exists, and may claim him, in the name of his father, a young soldier, who was killed in his first engagement, and who was moreover her best beloved nephew. The superior of the hospital, who is one of this lady's friends, is helping her in her charitable inquiries, and is seizing every opportunity for collecting testimony, and so getting some clue to the child's whereabouts. She made Genevieve's acquaintance while the epidemic was raging in these parts. She learned from me that this charitable servant of the late vicar of Valneige was here, spending her days and nights by the bedside of a dying mountaineer; and she is anxious to obtain from her any recollections or private information that may help the stranger lady to prove the existence and identity of her sister's son. These two ladies will be here immediately; tell Genevieve that they are coming, and wherefore. It is a very delicate subject for her, for she will now be able to clear the honour of her sister Josette, and to restore a name, family, and fortune to a child, in whom the good woman cannot but be interested."

"Yes," I said to my friend, "she indeed takes too much interest in the child; for she believes that she has found him in Euce's son whom you see there playing in the court-yard with my dog, and whose face and sensibility you have daily admired as you stood by the poor tinker's bedside. I will go and prepare Genevieve for her visitors."

And I went out with that intention.

CLXVIII.

On entering the sick man's room I found the superior, the stranger lady, Genevieve, and Luce, already engaged in an excited conversation, revealing by the emotion of their countenances and the tones of their voices, the different sentiments by which each was agitated. I listened to the conversation without taking any part in it; except when I was besought to do so by an imploring look from Genevieve.

CLXIX.

"But, ma'am," said Genevieve to the stranger, an aged and infirm woman, whose dress betokened her high rank, "how did you come to hear of the connexion between your nephew and my sister, and of the birth of a child, the fruit of their love and clandestine marriage?"

"In two ways," replied the stranger in a tone of easy assurance and gentle dignity: "first, from the thoughtless and blameworthy priest who, having rashly lent his sacred ministry to the consummation of an illegal and secret marriage, repented of his conduct on his death-bed, confessed all to his bishop, and besought him to inform our family of the fact, and of the probable existence of some disinherited issue of the marriage. Secondly, from my poor nephew himself; before the fatal engagement in which he fell, he had a presentiment of his death, and wrote a will, which I have here in my pocket-book. In case of his death, he had intrusted it to the care of a soldier of his company, the son of one of our tenants who lives in the same village as we do. This soldier, who could neither read nor write, unaware of the importance of the paper, did not forward it to us until his return home. This document revealed all; it gave to Josette and her child all the property of which my nephew was possessed at the time of his decease. This does not amount to a very considerable sum, for although several of his brothers and sisters have died since, they have all left children; but although this legacy only amounts to a thousand pounds, I should have been very guilty before my conscience and before God, if I had not made every endeavour to restore this little fortune to the mother and child for whom it was intended.

And then I have some fortune myself; I was doatingly fond of my nephew, and it would be so pleasant for me to find his counterpart in another being, who would recall his features to my mind, and give me a share in his affection! I ought to make every effort, and I will make every effort to save this orphan, if he still lives, from misery and desertion."

At these words, Genevieve, glancing significantly at the superior as much as to say, "Mark what is going to happen!" rose from her seat, went to the stair-head, took the child by the hand, and leading him up to the stranger, said nothing, but called her attention, as if by accident, to his pretty face. All the while she watched the old lady's countenance with the greatest anxiety. The mute interrogation was not long unanswered.

"Whose child is this? my God! whose child is this?" cried the good lady; "I fancy that I see before me the face of my nephew, when he was the same age as this innocent."

"He is my child, ma'am," said Luce, hesitating, blushing, and growing pale by turns, as though she had just told a lie.

"Oh! yes, he is our child," said the invalid, apparently wishing, by these words, the first he had uttered since Luce's avowal when he made his will, indirectly to indicate to his wife that he both pardoned her, and adopted the child.

"No, no, do not tell a lie, Jean; do not stammer, my poor Luce," said Genevieve; "he is indeed your child by love, but not by parentage."

Luce covered her face with her apron, and made no answer.

"Yes, I am your son," said the child in a low tone, taking hold of Luce's apron by the corner, and pulling it away from her face. "Why do you blush on my account before everybody—have I done anything wrong to-day?"

Luce kissed him, but said nothing.

CLXX.

Then the superior, having summoned the young physician, the notray, the vicar of Voiron, and the justice of peace, who had been requested by her to be present at the explanations

which would have to take place between herself and Genevieve, made us all sit down on the beds with which Jean's room was furnished, and taking a seat herself by the side of the stranger lady, addressed Genevieve in these words :—

CLXXI.

"My poor Genevieve, there is no shame in heaven. Your lovely little sister is there with the angels whom she so much resembled, I do not doubt; so, the hour has come to tell frankly and conscientiously the truth about a fault which death has punished only too severely, and to clear her memory of which, you have endured so many trials and so much humiliation. Your sister was married clandestinely, nearly ten years ago, to a young quartermaster, the nephew of this lady."

"I cannot deny it," said Genevieve.

"A child was born from this union, and not knowing how you could avow and legitimize his birth, in the embarrassment of the moment you sent him to the foundling hospital to be suckled, intending to take him away from thence secretly; as soon as you could do so without injury to your sister's reputation."

Genevieve said nothing, but inclined her head in token of assent.

"The nurse who was taking the child to the hospital, was detected by the commissary of police, and imprisoned. The lock of his mother's hair and other signs of recognition were taken from the child's neck; for the government, more severe and cruel than religion, had ordered us, when we received children into the hospital, to destroy these signs, and to intimidate guilty mothers, by depriving them of all hope of finding their children again, and mingling all the poor orphans in one single flock. It is sad that I should have to say this, but it is nevertheless true, gentlemen," she said, turning towards the magistrates. "But woman's charity has ever transgressed this law, when it has been possible to do so. When the law of man is contrary to the law of nature and of God, we do wrong to obey it. I have considered it my duty never to obey this law."

"Oh! what happiness!" cried Genevieve, clasping her hands together.

"The commissary of police secretly gave me the hair and other tokens which he had taken from the nurse. By a pious subterfuge, I placed them between two pieces of cloth, and slipped them into the bundle of baby-linen belonging to the poor child, and when his first nurse came to take him, I pointed out to her the place in which I had sewn this registry of his birth, so that she might unsew it at some future time, and at every risk, make it the inseparable companion of her nursing."

At these words, Genevieve darted towards Jean's bed, by the side of which Luce and the child were weeping, and, opening quickly his waistcoat and shirt, she seized the box which contained the paper and the lock of Josette's hair, in spite of all his efforts to prevent her.

"Is it this? Oh! for mercy's sake, ma'am, tell me, tell me, is it this?" cried she, showing the tress to the superior.

"It is this, my daughter," solemnly said the nun. "Now God be praised, my dear friend," she continued, taking the hair from Genevieve's hands and giving it to the stranger: "this is henceforward your property, your title to the possession of this orphan."

Genevieve stood motionless at these words, horrified at having unwittingly laboured for another, and thus lost possession of the child whom she thought she had gained for ever. Luce became as pale and statue-like as a rustic Niobe; Jean hid his head beneath the coverlet to sob unseen.

CLXXII.

"Then you are going to rob me of my child?" said unhappy Luce, at length, recovering her speech, and clasping Bastien to her bosom.

The child hung around her neck, and from that asylum glanced with anger and alarm towards the superior, Genevieve, and all the rest of us.

"You see, he is not yours!" said the justice of peace, severely.

"Not mine!" cried Luce, starting to her feet, and holding up the child in her arms, as though calling God to witness the

violence which this robbery would do to the rights which her heart told her she had over the child. "Not mine! then let him restore to me my own son whom I lost through love for him, let him give me back the milk with which I nourished him, the tears which I have wept over him, the blood that has passed from my heart into his! And then try to tear away his heart from me, and give it to her, and to her!" she added with a look and tone of contempt, glancing almost fiercely at Genevieve and the stranger.

"Yes," said Bastien, doubling his fists and repeating Luce's words, "let them try and take away my heart from Luce and Jean, and give it to those people. No, no, no; not even to you, Genevieve, though you are so kind, and have cured my father!"

Genevieve felt stricken to the heart. The old lady appeared surprised and disconcerted; the superior embarrassed. The magistrates interchanged looks of astonishment, which seemed to say: "We reckoned without regard to nature!"

CLXXIII.

"But, my good people," said the old lady, at length, "and you, my child, you cannot be so obstinate in refusing to the family and the aunt of this orphan's natural father that which is adjudged to them by society and the law!"

"And by nature, too," said Genevieve, thinking of herself.

"No," resumed the superior, "you cannot, my good women. I am here, obliged by my conscience to bear witness against you. The child is really the son of the quartermaster, and was acknowledged by him in his will, and of the sister of Genevieve, who has the same right to his possession, as he is her blood-relation and has cost her so many long years of undeserved shame and trouble!"

Genevieve looked at the superior with hopeful gratitude.

"The child belongs to his father's relations," said the justice of peace. "You need only speak, madam, you need only produce at Grenoble your nephew's will, and the testimony of the lady superior; and the child will be handed over to you immediately by justice."

"And do you call that justice!" said Luce, darting towards

the door to carry the child off, and hide him somewhere. She was, however, prevented.

"I have not come such a distance to repair one wrong by another," said the old lady sorrowfully. "I shall certainly not employ the hand of justice to snatch the sapling from the stock on which it has been grafted for eight years. I will not lacerate three or four hearts to console and heal my own."

"What is to be done?" said the superior, and her words were repeated by Genevieve.

"Let the law take its course," said the justico.

"Let nature take her course," I cried, much moved and affected.

Luce threw herself on her knees before me, and placed the child within my arms, as if I had been a messenger from heaven sent to save her from the loss of her son. I put him on the ground before Genevieve, who stooped to kiss him, and I said to the old lady:

"The law gives him to you, madam, nature gives him to Genevieve, affection gives him to Luce; but to whom does he give himself?"

"To my mother—to my dear mother, Luce," cried the poor child, struggling to escape from my hands, and stretching out his little arms towards Luce.

Genevieve wiped away the tears from her eyes, and, with a voice broken by her sobs, said to Luce:

"With the help of God, I have saved your husband's life; I have no wish to deprive you of your child, so I give him to you."

"And I," said the old lady, gravely, "I will not, to console my old age, deprive this child of so excellent a mother. I also give him to you. What God has done himself is well done; I will not presume to interfere with the arrangements of Providence."

"O divine goodness!" cried Luce, throwing herself with the child at the feet of the superior and her friend; "if you had taken him from me I should have died! . . . And Jean," she added, looking towards her husband, "what would he have done without his apprentice?"

"And me too," said Genevieve, "you would have been

obliged to take me with him, for I could no more leave him now, than I can forget to think of my poor sister."

Then, turning to Luce, she said: "You will take me to Gros Soyer with you, will you not? I have very little appetite, and shall not cost you much; I will work hard for my food, and I will never ask for any other wages than to see the child, and teach him to read and to pray for his first mother, and for Luce and Jean, and for you too, ma'am," she added, kindly taking the stranger's hand and pressing it to her lips.

"No, you will not require any wages, my good woman," said the old lady; "I will take care that none of you shall want."

At these words she turned towards the notary and the justice of peace, and said to them:

"Here is a pocket-book containing the thousand pounds which my nephew bequeathed to his son, in case I was ever able to ascertain his existence. I give the use of it to Luce and her husband, on condition that they shall lodge and comfortably provide for Genevieve in their house until her death; and after them, the property will pass to this child. You will kindly employ this sum in the purchase of some small estate, near the residence of these good people at Gros Soyer. Jean was a tinker, he will now become a farmer, as that is a more sedentary and more respectable occupation."

"Oh, heaven, what happiness!" cried Luce, clapping her hands together. "Jean, my dear, you will never leave me again in the winter-time to go on your rounds. Oh, how long those winters used to seem when I was all alone in our house on the mountains! But now there will be four of us, and we will buy Mother Maraude's cottage, and meadow, and chesnut-trees."

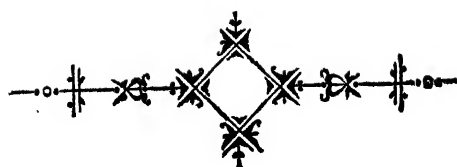
"And the pear-tree?" said Genevieve, archly.

"Oh, yes," said Luce, "I had forgotten that; I sold it for this child, and now the child restores it to me with the courtyard, the house, and the field which it used to overhang."

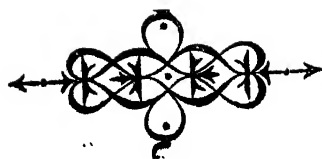
"It is thus that our merciful God acts," said Genevieve; "he takes away one pear and gives you a basket-full. Oh, you will show me the tree, will you not, Luce? and I will go and sit under it in the summer-time, and spin my flax, and watch the cows, and think of my dear Josette!"

* * * * *

It was all arranged as I have just related. Jean soon regained his health, and Genevieve left the temporary hospital of Valneige, where her place was taken by a Sister of Charity from Voiron. The poor servant went to the mountains with Luce and her husband and child, and still sits knitting in summer at the foot of the pear-tree, where I see her every year when I go hunting among the mountains.



THE
STONEMASON OF SAINT POINT.



THE STONEMASON OF SAINT POINT.

CHAPTER I.

I.

ON issuing from the pretty little town of Macon, and proceeding in the direction of the western mountains, we follow at first, for some hours, a wide road bordered with vines, which undulates with the ground, like the track of a ship over the wavy surface of a swelling sea. Numerous villages with red-tiled roofs and whitewashed walls, and with vine-branches over their doors, appear on the slope of every hill, and their smoke may be seen curling upwards in the depths of every gorge. Meadows surround them, and the winding course of the little rivers which water these meadows may be traced by rows of willows, lopped by the knife every three years. Their slender branches, yielding to the lightest breeze that turns their leaves and seems to frost them over with silver, are just sufficiently long and tufted to afford a little shade to the children that keep the cows, and to lend an asylum—frequently discovered—for the nests of nightingales and kingfishers. Massive steeples of hewn stone in the form of elongated pyramids, stained by the rains, and clothed with the grey moss of centuries, tower above these villages. The eye of the traveller wanders continually from one of these steeples to another, as though he were employed in tracing to right and left the boundaries of a Roman road once carried across this populous country. In the shade of these hollow steeples, whence resounds at the swinging of the bell, the proclamation of the birth or the death of every inhabitant, may be seen the mallows that flourish in the cemeteries. It is there only that the hard-working vine-

dressers of these hills repose, after having for sixty or eighty years exchanged the sweat of their brows for the wine that they have raised to maintain their wives and daughters. A certain sweet joyousness is diffused with the rays of the sun, with the rivulets glancing like watered ribands, with the white reflex of the cottages, with the songs of the hay-makers, and the pealing of bells, over the whole of this country. The skies are mild, the earth smiles, the wanderer says to himself, "I should like to live there!" and he grows melancholy, he scarcely knows why, as he leaves the bright and charming region behind him.

II.

In proportion as you approach the foot of the mountains, the vine ceases, the villages become more rare, and, finally, are scattered into detached hamlets, or into groups of two or three cottages here and there on the steep slopes of the meadows, or of the rocks clothed with box-trees. When you have reached the ridge of the mountain called the *Bois Clair*, without doubt, because the morning sun, rising behind the Jura and Mont Blanc, touches the lofty branches of its chestnut woods with its earliest rays, you turn back instinctively to cast a last look over the far-stretching scene upon which the black curtain of the mountain is about to fall; the Maconnais with its yellow vines, the Saône gliding like a long silver snake among its green meadows, La Bresse all velvet-like with its harvests and its willows, the black Jura, the golden Alps; and then you begin the descent by a rapid slope towards the ancient monastic town of Cluny, shaded like an owl's nest under the bronzed and silent spires of the steeples of its abbey. But at the foot of the descent of the *Bois Clair*, the road forks off in two directions: one of its branches leads to Cluny across fields as fat and monotonous as the monkish luxury which formerly possessed these pastures and forests; the other branch leads to the mountains of the Charolais, all full of woods and waters, melancholy pasture-lands, and the bleating of flocks.

III.

For some time you pursue this road, which has already

become pastoral, meeting no one, but some children in rags, who keep the goats, or who lead the cattle among the bushes. Then the heights of the *Bois Clair* suddenly assume a softer character on your left hand: they open to view a little river called La Vallouze, which issues from a green gorge at your feet. By its sparkling and babbling over the stones under the willows, it seems to invite you to penetrate into this gorge, and to visit the mysterious winding valley, of which it is the first revelation. You say to yourself, "Whence come these waters, and how is it that so narrow a gorge contains so plentiful a river? It must become wider? It is perhaps deep? The sources that supply it must have steep-lined flanks and rocky reservoirs? Who knows! perhaps there lies concealed amidst its windings some large basin where meadows spread out, where forests wave, where green hills swell, where a church stands on the rocks amidst a village, near which are the skeleton-like remains of some ancient castle? Let us enter the gorge:" and by a slight motion of the left hand, you turn your horse's head towards the sandy path beside the river Vallouze, that leads into the valley of Saint Point.

IV.

In the beauty of form, or of moral character, or of the material creation, it is that which is most veiled, which is most beautiful. The mysteries of the heart and of nature are the delight of the intellect, the soul, and the eyes. It seems as though the Creator had thrown a shadow over whatever he has made most delicate and most divine, to heighten our aspirations after it by its secrecy, and to soften its lustre from our gaze, as he has placed lids over our eyes to temper the impression of light upon them, and night over the stars, to incite us to follow and seek them in their airy ocean, and measure his power and greatness by those studs of fire which his fingers, as they touched the vault of heaven, have stamped on the firmament. Valleys are the mysteries of landscapes. We long to penetrate them, the more they try to wind, bury, and hide themselves. Such is the impression made by the valley of Saint Point at each successive step that the traveller makes

in exploring it. The farther he goes, the more mysterious it becomes.

V.

The valley of Saint Point is only a large fissure, which the waters of some flood, or the sinking of the foundations of the soil, or the rending asunder of the rocks in an earthquake, has made between two mountains that must formerly have been in contact. In the lapse of centuries, the opposite sides of these two mountains running from north to south, have become covered with sand, brought from I know not what dried-up ocean, and with a poor and scanty soil, constantly increased by vegetation and the annual fall of the leaves, always carried downwards into the ravines by their own weight and the rains and snows of winter. The skeletons of these two parallel mountains are thus covered at the present time by woods and meadows, with fine grass, like the green fleece of the earth. But by the retreating or projecting angles of the swells and promontories which they form, the size and shape of which on one side appear to correspond geometrically with those on the other, we seem to recognize on one side of the valley that which has been rent from the other. These two mountains, like two long walls of a fortress, sustained and flanked only by their bastions, are not broken from beginning to end by the passage of any transversal valley; and Saint Point is itself completely shut in on the south by a very elevated platform, above which only the sombre cones and cupolas of the distant crests of the Forez can be seen on the horizon. You begin your course at the edge of narrow meadows, where the river can scarcely find room to glide under the alders and walnuts. You breathe the humid air of ravines, shut in from a free circulation, and having no great openings. On your left hand are sandy slopes of red granite, loosened and pulverized by time; on your right, the branches of aquatic trees, where the blackbirds beat their wings as they rise suddenly at the sound of the horse's feet; before you, the windings of the path, which seems to become narrower and more devious. Like a snake, which, creeping among grasses, seeks its way towards the sun, it accommodates itself to all the sinuous turnings, and all the undulations of the region.

VI.

You soon, however, breathe a freer air ; your eyes are impressed by a brighter daylight ; a wider expanse of sky may be seen between the peaks of the two chains of hills ; the meadows expand, the slopes assume a softer character, the valley widens ; its two sides become hollow, like the sides of an antique pitcher, to comprise more space, light, and vegetation. You pass a little village, nearly hidden beneath the willows, called *Bourg Vilain*, from the use it anciently served. It was at first only a group of sheds, where the herdsmen and goat-herds sheltered their cattle when the snow covered the meadows. By degrees, these sheds became huts, these huts became cottages. A rustic church, surmounted by a great square tower, built of blocks of granite, piled irregularly one on the other, in time rose above them. Little gardens, surrounded by a hedge of living osiers, now flourish round these cottages ; the walls are rough-cast with white lime-wash ; the pane of glass takes the place of the black wooden shutter or paper frame, and glitters in the little windows between the golden spikes of the wallflowers. At some distance from the village, a peak of red sand rises on the right, from the banks of the river to the middle of the meadows. The miller has taken advantage of this natural obstacle to oppose a dam to the stream, and construct a sluice. The mill has spontaneously assumed a more picturesque form than could have been given to it by the capricious pencil of a Salvator Rosa.

Nature is a great artist, when she is left to herself to suit her means to her end. This mill is a proof of it. I never pass the village without admiring the unstudied combination, which makes of this building, constructed by chance, a model of picturesque taste. Thus, in winter, the river overflows and floods the meadows. It was necessary to build the house above these floods ; it has been, therefore, placed on the rock, where it has a view, and can be seen ; it was necessary that the current of the sluice should fall on the spokes of the wheel, to make the millstone move ; the house has therefore been built with one of its gables towards the river, that it may turn its wheel to the water ; the sluice in the middle of this side wall, the water which escapes from it forming a

cascade ; the bright green mosses, which give to the lower portion of the house the colour of *vert antique* ; the murmurs and rumblings of the stream, impatient to escape from the sluice ; the sparkling of its drops, foaming across the branches and making the wet leaves shine as if they were varnished ; the curtain of poplars and planes, which have naturally extended their roots into the stream, and interlaced their branches of many tints over the red-tiled roof, like a second roof ; the cavity at the side of the house, beneath the nave of the wheel, looking like a dark grotto veiled with foam ; the pigeon-house that it was necessary to add to the mill, because pigeons follow the grain that is scattered ; the square tower, which it has been necessary to raise a story higher than the roof, that the pigeons might know their home from a distance, above the trees ; the winding path which it was necessary to make with the pickaxe upon the sides of the hill in the yellow sand, that the asses and cars from the neighbouring villages might climb it with their sacks without difficulty ; the dust of the winnowed corn that issues from the window ; the blue smoke that curls from the roof between the tops of the poplars ; the goats, with their feet planted against the north wall, browsing on the vegetation that makes its stones as green as a meadow ; the flights of pigeons that come down into the court and dispute the corn with the cocks and hens ; the ass going up or coming down the staircase in the rock ; the miller's wife working at her window, her head bathed in the rays of the setting sun, which is reflected by the panes of glass in her upper room, that look as if they were on fire ; the children, who climb towards her with laughter and merriment up the verdant ladder of ivy, that makes a network frame over the water ; all this architecture, created by chance, or by the trade of the occupier,—water, walls, trees, rocks, site, path, cascade, hanging galleries, culminating tower, harmonious hues, lights and shadows distributed as if by the most studied combinations, grouping themselves solely as the wants of rural life indicated, standing out separately at different hours of the day, in various colours, from the dark or light background of the mountain on which they are painted, as on a canvass ; all this construction, I say, would defy the imagination of a poet or a painter, to equal in grace and rustic beauty. It

takes possession of the imagination through the eyes, and of the soul, by its serenity. It is an idea of Theocritus, built in rocks in the midst of fields ; it is a verse of Virgil, murmuring in sighs on the banks of running waters. It is a canvass of Claude Lorraine, bathed in peace and palpitating with life. It is the supreme art of that architect who knows nothing of art ; a manifestation of the beautiful ; it is the mill of Saint Point. I see even here the reflection of the rising sun on its tiles ; I hear the measured sound of its bolter, that heart of the house, that pulse of the mill !

VII.

After passing the mill, the valley widens into a basin of nearly a quarter of an hour's walk to cross, in the midst of which swells a low hill, crowned at its summit by an old chateau, flanked by compact towers, and also by the indented spire of an ancient church-steeple. At the foot of the hill lie meadows bordered with alders, cherry-trees, and large walnut-trees. Through their trunks you perceive the walls, roofs, and rustic bridge of a village, built under the shelter of the chateau, and composed of fifteen or twenty cottages—such as are always grouped round the village church—belonging to labourers, farmers, or small tradesmen, who sell commodities suited to the country. Those old towers, undermined by time, which has made them crack and split under their own weight, having lost the pinnacles which formerly raised them towards the sky, and serving no purpose at present but that of flanking a heavy, massive, square building, containing a winding staircase and some vaulted rooms,—that is my dwelling-place.

I have sown green lawns ; I have made out a few sandy walks in the thickets of walnuts which surround it ; I have enclosed within a circumference of walls some acres of land and some meadows, which follow the undulations and caprices of the hill ; I have preserved from the knife or hatchet of the farmer some large trees, whose branches have rewarded me by spreading over my green sward ; I have knocked out some doors and windows in the five-foot-thick wall of the old mansion ; I have added to the principal front a massive gallery of sculptured stone, on the model of the old Gothic balus-

trades of Oxford. On this gallery the inhabitants of the house walk in the morning at sunrise, or sit in the evening in the wide shadow of the towers extending over the sloping meadow. Here we hang our birdcages on nails; the dogs lie at our feet on the warm flag-stones; tame peacocks, that live in the garden, to whom we gave bread when they were young, and who still remember it, perch night and day upon the parapet of the balustrade, their tails shining in the sun, and floating in the wind. They edge that heavy stone gallery with a range of living cariatides, as the storks form living battlements with their white plumage on the roofs of the Asiatic villages.

VIII.

The view extends over the most beautiful portion of the valley of Saint Point, the ground alternately rising and sinking. First, the eye glides over the meadows down a rapid descent; these at length sink into one which is level with the river. The Vallouze flows through it. Large walnut-trees, with bronze-coloured leaves, aspens, with trunks made crooked by storms, and foliage longer and whiter than the hair of a hale old man, poplars—those cypresses of Europe—birches, alders, forbidden by me to the pruning-knife or the tree-lopper for the last five-and-twenty years, bending from both sides of the river over the water which they love, and which loves them, form, as they interlace their branches over its course, an elevated arch of leaves, which is floating and capricious, and coloured with every tint,—a true mosaic work of vegetation. The least breath of the summer wind waves all this mobile curtain, and brings forth from it undulations, soft breezes, glancing of leaves, flight of birds, and vegetable scents, which give repose to the eyes, vary the view, and rise in gentle sounds and fugitive odours even to the gallery.

IX.

Beyond the river and meadows, the eye begins again to ascend by stages the fertile and swelling sides of the lofty chain of hills which separate the valley of Saint Point from the horizon of the Maconnais, La Bresse, the Jura, and the Alps. These consist, in their lower portions, of red-

coloured land, deep in soil, rich in strong vegetation, such as beans in flower ; beetroot with large varnished leaves ; tufted artichokes, over which float white flakes of mist at sunrise ; then orchards, surrounded by hedges of wild plums, under which beautiful cows spotted with black and white ruminates, and their plaintive lowing is echoed from hill to hill ; two or three little villages, half-way up the side of the hill above these fields and orchards, send up their smoke from the midst of their fruit-trees. The eye looks beyond the smoke, to steeper heights with deep ravines hollowed in the red sand. Cars may be seen at long intervals dragged with difficulty by white cows, and loaded with manure, which the peasant takes to the higher clearings, to help to fertilize his poor, thin oats, or his backward barley. Others are coming down laden with beech and chestnut branches, destined to heat the oven where he bakes his bread. The leaves, trailing behind the tumbrils, sweep the valleys as the broom of the housewife sweeps the polished floor of her house.

These hollow roads, like the openings of grottos, bend and are lost to the eye behind the winding of the hills in the very heart of the mountains, or under the shade of the chestnut woods. Their track can only be discovered by the distant voice of the drover encouraging his cattle to mount higher. These voices, swelled by the dome of the chestnut-trees, and echoed from trunk to trunk, mixed with the neighings of colts in the meadows, with the lowing of oxen lying among the long grass, the bleatings of sheep, the tremulous cry of goats, the cackling of hens, the songs of birds in the bushes, the creaking of the noisy axle-trees of the ploughs in the furrows, the sound of falling water from the sluices near the mills, the tinkling of the bell which rings the Angelus morning, noon, and evening, for the labourers and shepherds at work, fill this sonorous basin between the two chains with a murmur like that of those sea-shells which we put to our ears to hear the eternal reverberation of the waves.

Finally, still higher, groups of chestnuts and beeches, divided by fields of purple heath and yellow broom, bristle on the higher hills ; there vegetation becomes poor under the freezing breath of the cold region, or contracts the sterility

of the rock. The crests of the mountains, naked except for the presence of a few trunks of holly or some thorns, are lost in the blue sky or the floating mists. These mists, by always veiling the uncertain limits between earth and heaven, suggest infinite elevation to the eye, in which the mind loves to wander. Mist is to mountains what illusion is to love—it elevates them. Mystery hovers over everything here below, and solemnizes all things to the eyes and heart.

X.

Such is the view from the gallery of Saint Point in the morning. Under the evening light, the slopes seem less steep, the hollows and swells of the hills more soft, the villages nearer together, and more distinctly situated on platforms of green turf, the woods, more uniform and dark, appear to extend over more gentle declivities. The wide shadows cast beneath them by the setting sun increase their velvet-like beauty; the character of wildness disappears, and gives place to the umbrageous and pastoral loveliness of the freshest valleys of the Alps. When you wish to admire, to pray, to dream, you look at the mountains in the morning; when you would hope, desire, enjoy, become wrapped up in the peaceful images of rural life, you look at the mountains under their evening aspect. One is a picture of felicity on earth, the other a ladder of infinite aspiration to heaven. Each presents one of the most beautiful scenes in the decoration of that drama of happy life wherein the Creator has delighted to employ his hand.

XI.

It is there I have lived since my infancy. Whenever the billows of life, which shrink or swell by turns beneath me, carry me back to this first resting-place of my laborious and agitated life, I bless the springs, summers, autumns, and even the few winters that I have been able to pass there during the last twenty years between the memories and the consolations of the hearth. Alas! during these latter years, I only go there to walk with a few hurried steps, pressed forward by changing events, to measure with a rapid glance the growth of trees which I planted with a hope to bury myself in their

shade—but the leaves of which fall under the feet of strangers—and to pray there for a moment upon two tombs.

XII.

One morning of 1846, on my return from a long journey beyond the Alps, I came there alone, in the month of May, to see, during my passing stay, whether time had not brought anything into a state of disrepair in this family nest, and to order some improvements. It is thus that the sailor, after being some weeks in port, goes from time to time on board his ship that is laid up,—visits her hull and her keel, and orders a plank here, an iron bolt there, a partition elsewhere, in order that he may find his floating dwelling in a good state when the owner shall make him a signal to go to sea again.

XIII.

Going round the garden after breakfast with the old farmer, who was in the family before I was born, and whom I now maintain idle in a corner of his farm, like an ancestor of the domain and of the house, I saw that the branches of the cedars, larches, and firs, had grown large and spread out like arms over the boundary-wall that separates me from a road frequented by the shepherds. They had swayed in the wind, and broken the stones on the top of the wall, crumbling away the mortar, and opening breaches into the enclosure, by which children could climb to take birds' nests. I have the trees more for the birds than for myself. Birds are the poetry of song, the hymn of air. If they are destroyed, who will sing in the creation? I know nothing more sad than to find under the church tower, or under the ledge of the roof of the house, or on the sand of the garden-walk under a tree, the ruined nest of a swallow, chaffinch, or nightingale, with the shells of its little grey eggs scattered on the ground, beside the soft down and hair which the father and mother had woven and twisted together during the whole of the spring for their little ones.

XIV.

I said to Father Litaud—for such is the name of this

venerable old man with an Homeric face and hair, silvered as though it were the foam of a life so long tossed by the wind of these hills—I said to him, “Father!” for I maintain towards him that kind of filial relationship which the child of the house contracts towards the old servants, who are older denizens of the family hearth than himself; I said to him, “Father! we must repair this ruinous wall, replace these stones, fill up these breaches with cement, and, in order to prevent the trees from opening them again by the friction of their branches, we must substitute a line of hewn flat stones, which will top the wall like the parapet of a bridge, for this curb-stone and row of tiles, which defend the top of the enclosure very imperfectly. The trees may rest their arms on these flat stones without restraint, and the branches, while they play over them at liberty, will only polish them as running water polishes the rock.” But it must be done quickly, for the equinoctial winds, which will reach us in September, will come rushing in against these long branches, and will carry away the remainder of the tiles and cement. Send for the stonemason of the village, whom I saw the other day working at the end of a quarry as I was crossing the remote and ruined hamlet of La Féé on horseback. I will take the dimensions, settle the price, set him to work in the quarry at the bottom of the garden, and next year the birds will build in these lilacs in peace.”

XV.

“Yes, sir,” replied Father Litaud, hesitating, with a certain accent of incredulity and doubt; but I saw in his expression, in his eye which looked as though it were wandering through disturbing thoughts, and in the attitude of his head, which he leaned down as though he were seeking something in the grass, that the old man did not inwardly, confirm the “yes” which he had said at the first moment.

“Is there no stonemason in the village?” rejoined I, anxious to insure my repairs being completed.

“Yes, sir, there is one,” replied the old man, “and a good workman and a serviceable one besides,” he added; “but I am not very sure whether he will consent to come down and work for the family.”

"For what reason?" said I, with surprise. "Is not my money worth as much as other people's? Shall I not pay him for the block of stone he cuts at the same rate, and even dearer, considering the urgency of the occasion, than the peasants of the country? Why should he not come if you send for him immediately in my name?"

"Because this stonemason does not work for money."

"Very well; I will give him grain, corn, potatoes, walnut-oil, baskets of apples or plums,—in short, whatever he chooses."

"But the thing is, that he no longer works for wages like other people."

"Why does he work at all, then?"

"For the good God, sir, and the poor people of the good God. Only for him, only for them; and as *Monsieur* is rich, as he is proprietor of the woods, the fields, and the chateau, I am afraid that this man, who is gentle, but as firm in his mind as the stones he works upon, may say: 'The master is rich enough to have his work done by workmen, paying them good wages by the day or the job; if I agree to work for him, I shall fail some poor people who may have a door or window to cut out; and then *Monsieur* will wish to give me higher wages than I take for my day's work, which provides me exactly with my bread; I shall not know how to refuse this money, and if I accept it, I shall break my rule of life.' In one word, sir, I repeat to you, I am afraid this man will not come."

"No, no," said I, "he cannot refuse to come. He shall fix his own price, since he is so just. And if my money, which he will have well earned, weighs on his conscience as a charitable man, he shall give it to poorer people than himself, that is all. Send by one of your shepherds this evening, and beg him to come down. I shall expect him here to-morrow. Even if I should not come to an understanding with him, I shall be very glad to have seen a man who refuses gold in a country like these mountains, where the love of gain is so eager, that a red copper sou to be lost or won seems to be the ultimate end of man's existence among so many rich Christians. It will be to me like a spring gushing from a rock in the midst of this sand, which would suck up the clouds of heaven."

"Very well, sir, I will obey you, and persuade him to come down. But I shall go myself, for he would not listen to my shepherd. I shall reason with him better than a child like that could do."

So saying, Father Litaud took the path towards his farm, with a step that was still elastic and vigorous, to take off his *sabots*, button his gaiters, and get his iron-pointed stick, which takes hold of the sand of the mountain.

I went in to take my dogs and gun, and go up to the wood on the western mountain.

CHAPTER II.

1.

NEXT day, at noon, as I returned from shooting, I heard the dogs barking in the court. I went down : it was Father Litaud and the stonemason.

"Here is Claude des Huttes," said the old farmer to me, with an accent of satisfaction in his voice, which revealed in him an inner feeling of triumph that he felt at having succeeded in his negotiation better than he had expected the evening before. "He consents," added he, "to come and do the job for *Monsieur*, and to work for the *chateau*, because *Mukanne* is good to the poor."

"Very well : let us go and see the wall, and measure the number and size of the stones required for the coping," said I to the two peasants.

They took the way towards the cedars with me.

While walking, I, unobserved, examined the stonemason with attention, for this man inspired me from the first moment with a certain feeling of respect. Though humble and timid in his attitude, one could see that he did not feel subdued by the superiority of my coat, or the *prestige* of my house, larger than any in the village ; but that he rendered an account of each of his steps and each of his impressions to one greater and higher than I. His holy meditations placed him in the presence of God. The winding walk from the door-sill to the breach in the wall by the cedars was a

long one. I had time to take an accurate sketch of his appearance, and store it in my memory.

II.

Claude des Huttes was a man about thirty-six or forty years of age, of the middle size, with rather a slender figure, and a slight stoop, like a workman accustomed to bend under the weight of heavy things. His limbs had not the elastic vigour, the tense muscles of the chamois hunters in our Alps; they bent as if he often had to kneel at his work. One of his shoulders was much higher, more knotted, and stronger than the other; it was that in which the right arm was set which raises and lowers the hammer without ceasing. Though his arms were thin, and though his sleeves, which only half covered them, allowed the veins and the nearly unclothed tendons and muscles to be seen, his hands were long, massive, knotted at the joints, rough in the skin, and like pincers. The habit of moving, turning, and shaping great stones had developed and hardened in him that first tool of man,—the hand. He let them hang like two idle weights, which evidently embarrassed him when he had nothing to carry. His large and naked feet, the great toes of which, strongly developed, pressed into the soil, left prints on the sand of the damp walk like the nails of my horse's shoes in the grass of the meadow after a heavy dew. He held his red woollen cap in his hand. His hair, black, thick, powdered over with some grains of marble-dust, floated about a hand's length behind his neck; it was cut square, in large locks, by his own scissors, so as only to lap over like a black border or edge between the nape of his neck and the collar of his shirt, to protect his throat from the snow and rain. He wore a shirt of unbleached linen, open at the throat, fastened over his chest with two brass nails, one of which acted as a pin, and the other, bent in a circle round the first, formed a kind of knot, which caught the linen together, and flattened it over his chest. He carried his jacket over his left shoulder. It was evidently, in his estimation, only a sign of respect, a mark of deference, an honorary decoration, which he bore on my account, and not on his own. His white woollen trousers, of the same material as his jacket, were fastened

round his waist by a strong belt of red leather, with little pockets fastened with leather laces, out of which the two ends of his compasses, and the handles of his three hammers protruded. These trousers only came as low as his ankles. A long goat-skin apron fluttered and rustled on his knees at every step. He walked with the slow and measured pace of a man who thinks as he walks, and whose interior harmony — that balance of the human pendulum — instinctively regulates the movements of the body. Such was the exterior of the stonemason.

III.

But under this rude exterior, and these rustic garments, there nevertheless shone forth, from the uncovered head of this man a stamp, I do not only say of the dignity, but of the divinity of the human countenance which overawed your eye, and removed any idea of vulgarity and of disdain from the mind of the beholder. The outline of the forehead was as elevated, as straight, as free from any ignoble curves or depressions, as the outline of the forehead of Plato, in his busts, that reflect the sun of Attica. The muscles of the orbits of his eyes, his temples, his cheeks, lips, and chin, attenuated, hollow, palpitating, had, at the same time, the repose and the sensibility of a young girl just recovering from some long illness, or from some secret sorrow. His eyelids, fringed with long lashes, rose over the round clear-blue and widely-opened eyes like the lids of a man accustomed to look upwards, and on elevated things. The lashes threw a shade full of mystery between the edge of the lids and the eye. Meditation and prayer might shelter themselves there without interrupting his glance. His nose, straight, and slightly raised in the middle, by the net-work of veins visible beneath a fine skin, showed the partition of the nostrils by which it was attached to the lips, and which was transparent in the sun that shone on the other side of him. The muscles of the mouth were pliant, without contraction and without harshness; they were a little pressed downwards at the corners by the weight of an involuntary sorrow; but often they were raised again by the spring of his intellectual firmness. His complexion had the smooth and healthy whiteness

of marble which is exposed to the air. The strong shadow of his black hair flickered on his cheeks, and relieved their paleness. His face was a little bent downwards, more by the habitual power of reflection than by the attitude of his trade. Walking in this manner near this man, imperfectly seen on one side in the light of the sun, which he hid from me, and which clothed him with its halo of rays, I seemed to be walking beside a soul. Everything thought, everything felt, everything aspired, everything ascended in that head, when detached from the rustic body which carried it. One could fancy that one saw the profile of a thought making itself visible, in the morning sun, upon the blue and luminous vault of the firmament. I did not dare to address a word to him, for fear of deranging the repose of his features. His voice, when he briefly answered the old farmer, was vibrating, deep, and low, like the sound of a thin marble slab without a crack, under the small hammer of the polisher. His accent was not that of talking—he chanted. One might have said that everything was a hymn in that breast, even to yes or no.

IV.

Father Litaud cast upon me aside every now and then a look of intelligence, as if to say to me, “Is not the mason like what I described to you?” Then he would shake his white hair a little, as though he said to himself, “I doubt whether Monsieur will make him listen to reason.”

We reached the cedars. I showed the mason the top of the ruinous wall. He took out his six-foot measure, that was folded up like a fan, marked in feet, inches, and lines, to measure the number and thickness of the blocks which I required.

“It is so many *toises*,” said he, approaching me.

“Very well! Get the work done for me as soon as possible. There is my quarry, not two paces from this place, from which you can hew them. But tell me first how much you will charge for them by the square foot?”

“I do not know at all,” answered he, with obvious and touching embarrassment.

“But who can know, if you do not? Must I settle it myself?”

"No, sir," replied he timidly, and with an increasing embarrassment, which made the veins swell, and the skin become slightly red on his bent-down forehead. "Neither you nor I. It will be God."

"Why God!" I cried.

"Yes," he added, "there is no other than he who knows how much time I shall employ in hewing the stones from the quarry, in cutting and polishing them. When they are done, I will calculate what it will be just I should have for my food, but nothing for my trouble, sir. For as to trouble, that is not imposed upon us by man, but by God, and he it is who pays for it. You, in your room, on your horse, or with your books, under these shady trees, you will, perhaps, have more of it than I shall."

These words, said without ostentation, and flowing quite naturally from his lips like his respiration, with an accent, not of defiance, of superiority, or of insolence, but with the tone of simplicity, and even of compassion, struck me. I did not choose to offend him by resistance, nor to enter prematurely on a conversation which might have led to an argument. I showed neither surprise nor annoyance.

"Very well," said I to Father Litaud, "take him to the quarry, and set him to work." I went in.

Half an hour afterwards, I heard from my window the resounding blows of the pickaxe, and the heavy falls of the blocks of stone from the top of the quarry down to the bottom of the ravine.

I left Saint Point that evening.

V.

Three weeks afterwards, I returned to settle myself with my family there for the rest of the summer. On awaking the morning after my arrival, I did not hear the sound either of pickaxe or hammer in the quarry. I went there; but it was empty. There was only a small heap of grey stones at the bottom, newly cut away from the sides, and two or three roughly-hewn blocks lay on the ground. I hurried to Father Litaud, to ask the reason why this work, that was so urgent, and had been undertaken, was abandoned.

"I know nothing about it," said he. "Claude des Huttes worked there for some days, then, one morning, I saw no more of him. His fancy must have called him elsewhere. I told you so, sir ; there is no reliance to be placed on these saints. They make agreements with God, which supersede their bargains with men. Perhaps Claude may have found out that he was earning too much ; perhaps he may have said to himself :—

"I am the poor man's workman : if I work for gentlefolks, the poor will have nobody to work for them. Winter will come ; their houses will not be roofed in ; their barns will not be repaired ; their cow-houses will not be screened from the weather ; their grain will be injured ; their cattle will die ; their children will cry with cold in the cottages—and this will be my fault. God will take me to task for it. The chateau can always find workmen for money ; the work for the master of the garden is in no hurry ; the stones are falling, but they do not suffer. I must go'—or something of that sort ; how can I know ? It is impossible to be sure what the man's head has said softly to him—is not this true ? and then he would set off with his tools. If Monsieur wishes, I will go once more and speak with him, and beg of him to come down."

"No," said I to the old man, "I will go myself ; only point with your finger to his dwelling."

The old man held out his hand, as he raised his arm towards the highest summit of the chain of mountains on the east. He made me observe, almost at the extremity of the ridge, on the right of a grove of eight or ten chestnut-trees, and on the left of a grey rock, over which there hung a light mist, like that at the base of a waterfall, two or three white specks in the golden broom.

"Those are his goats, sir," said he ; "the house is not far off ; but you cannot see it from this point. The roof is hid by the corner of that hill and the branches of the walnut-tree, which are higher than the wall, and grow over the thatch. The smoke is only seen in the winter, when he burns a faggot of furze to warm the young kids."

"That is sufficient," said I ; "I know the mountain, and need no directions to guide me there. Have I not tended goats there also when I was young ?"

CHAPTER III.

I.

I BUTTONED my leather gaiters over my nailed shoes, I took the bells off my dog, that he might not frighten the goats, and warn Claude of my approach as he ran before me, I took my gun, that staff and familiar spirit of the sportsman, I passed the meadows in the valley, starting the thrushes as I went, and began slowly to climb the mountain by the fields, first ascending by a gentle slope, then becoming steep.

It was Sunday morning. I met no one in the fields; I had a long day before me; I turned back from time to time, and seated myself on the roots of some chestnut tree, to look down into the valley, which appeared deeper and more hollow at each resting-place. The sun had already left vacant that half of the face of the sky which he seemed to measure above the valley, and had begun to lean towards the opposite mountain, when I drew near the ruined hamlet of Les Huttes, whence the mason no doubt received his name. I had not been up there since I was eleven years old, at which time my mother withdrew me from the society of the little goat-herds of the country, to place me in the common mould of a college, in the society of professors, scholars, and books. During that happy period of my childhood, I used to climb the mountain once or twice a year with the women-servants of the house, to buy kids in the spring, and peeled chestnuts in autumn at the two or three cottages which the hamlet then contained.

II.

I well remembered the trees, the springs under the water-cresses and under the periwinkles, even the mosses on the large grey stones which stand out like the bones of the earth in the bed of broom; but the cottages no longer existed. I could see nothing from a distance in their place but two heaps of crumbling stone-work. Some blackberry-bushes grew over them. An old elder, a domestic tree, which likes to grow near the dwellings of men, as the mallow and the nettle flourish near his tomb in cemeteries, shed its flowers over the broken tiles. The remains of one wall, containing

a window through which the sky was seen, were held up by the gnarled branches of a magnificent holly, that vigorous and immortal tree, the sap of which flows even under the snow, and the bark of which, always green, and its leaves varnished like leather, seems to endure for centuries, and to pity the fleeting generations that pass and rest at its feet.

This sight made me melancholy,—but to that I am accustomed. I looked round, and searched for the slippery foot-path in the hollow of a ravine beside a small stream of water gushing out of the granite which formerly led to the third of the cottages. I discovered it under the dry leaves of last winter, which the warm winds of spring had scattered over the sides of the ravine, and I walked along it for some time to the sound of the waterfall, which rather dropped than poured down.

III.

The ravine, at first full of dampness and darkness, sometimes narrow, sometimes wide, wound between two walls of crumbled granite, which had been the origin of sand of different colours,—red, yellowish grey, and green, like the pebbles of *vert antique* that are found by the Syrian Sea. Wild cherries, dentated planes and larches, hardy trees that can bear the cold, leaned towards each other from the two upper edges of the gorge, and formed, as they were interlaced above, a high arch of motionless foliage. The sound of my steps echoed there, as if under the nave of a cathedral. A delicious shudder crept over my skin, as if I were walking up the avenue of some mystery; a few blackbirds only flew with scared and hurried wing before me. But it soon grew lighter, as though a lamp had been lighted above the transparent leaves; some little patches of blue sky might be seen through the trees, like pieces of lapis lazuli in a ceiling. The trees separated; the path ascended again to the right, towards the edge of the gorge and towards the light, by a rapid ascent. I passed on my left some swamps of green water in a hollow, such as, in the language of the mountains, is called an abyss. When I reached the summit of the rock, the dwelling of the stonemason was before me.

IV.

It was a shapeless ruin of dry stones, without mortar, backed by a great square block of grey granite, against which the walls of the third cottage of the hamlet of Les Huttes, which I had formerly visited, were still to be seen standing, but without door, or window, or roof. The platform of the rock, which had served as a pedestal to this goatherd's cottage, was strewn with tiles, pulverized by the feet of the animals, with rafters and joists, one end of which still held by the wall, and the other hung on the ground without support; finally, by old shreds of thatch, torn from the roof and whirling in the wind. The black mark of soot against a piece of brickwork, formerly lime-washed, still showed the situation of the hearth where this family of mountaineers had lived, loved, and perished. Behind these walls in ruins, the rock, having been hollowed into a water-course by the flow of the spring and by the rains, formed a sort of natural canal, whence the little cascade fell with a gentle sound into the ravine. It was on this side that the low window of the cottage, looking to the north, formerly opened. An immense ivy, with its roots in the water, had already, in my time, formed a frame for this window and this side of the wall. Now, it filled the opening entirely with a tufted mass of its leaves and its black berries, as if it bore fruit in mourning over the ruin of the house which had supported it; it fastened itself to the rafters, to the jambs of the chimney, to the door-posts; it grew thickly in cornices, forming borders at the top of each piece of wall, and even on the ledges of the rock, like a dog lying on his dead master, which presses him close with his paws, covers him with his body, and seems to defy men to take away from him the remains of him whom he has loved.

V.

Claude had not tried to rebuild the crumbled house that once belonged to his family, and to make it once more an asylum for himself. Nothing would have been easier, when the stones, wood-work, and tiles were still whole. Why had he preferred to lay himself at the foot of the rock, under a kind of hollow which formerly made a stable for the goats, and to sleep there like a beggar, without a door? God knows. Without doubt, it was from some secret superstition of his

heart concerning the roof where he had grown and loved, or out of horror at finding himself there alone, and feeling it so empty after having seen it so full. For it was not idleness ; he, every week, did, for nothing, more work than would have been required once more to raise and render habitable the substantial cottage of his mother.

VI.

Whatever it was, his cottage, or rather his grotto, only consisted of a kind of cave, cut either by the waters or by the crumbling away of a part of the solid material of the rock itself. As this cavity did not extend far inwards, he had added to it two little granite walls, composed of rough stones, most of them triangular ; these stones were placed without art, one upon another, in such a manner, however, as that the protruding angle of one fitted into the retiring angle of the other, in the manner of the cyclopean walls we see in Etruria, without being able to decide whether they were built by nature or by man. These two walls started from the rock, and were brought forward a few paces over the sloping pebbles, mixed with some tufts of boxwood ; another similar wall joined them together. It had a low door in it opposite to the valley, and a window beside it, half shut up by a bunch of broom, still in flower. The door, made of three pieces of worm-eaten plank, evidently taken from the relics of planks belonging to the cottage above, had no other fastening than a wooden latch, raised by a string, which hung outside in the day, and was brought in at night through a little hole above the latch, into the interior of the hut. The part of the roof which was fastened to the rock, and which jutted out a little from it, was covered, instead of thatch, with little whisps of broom, strongly fastened together with thick ropes made of twisted oat-straw, upon which the rain fell, and tufts of pellitory of the wall grew. The rock itself served as a natural roof for the back of the hut. There was still to be seen on the projecting ledge of the rock the remains of a gallery supported by an old beam, and ornamented with a ruinous balustrade and one or two steps of the staircase, which had formerly been the rustic porch of the house. The long dishevelled branches of the ivy of which I have spoken, which had now invaded every

part of the whole dwelling, grew over this ruinous gallery, and reached the roof of the new hut. A crooked quince-tree, some junipers, with their black berries, and a great cluster of hawthorn, vegetable forms that can grow in stony ground, had taken root in a natural cornice of rock. There they hung, with their branches, mistletoe, fruits, and flowers, over the roof. They nearly hid it with their dead leaves, green leaves, and the odoriferous snow of the hawthorn. I was astonished to see among the branches two or three nests of the small birds that frequent these heights; they sat on their eggs, looking out at me from the shadow of the leaves; they did not take flight at my approach, but seemed to have by instinct a feeling of confidence and security. The lizards in the wall did not run away either.

VII.

I drew the string of the wooden latch, and entered the hut, calling *Claude des Huttes*. The hut was empty. I cast a rapid glance around it, in order to form an opinion of the manners and habits of the owner, by the appearance of his habitation. A single look taught me the life of this poor solitary. The end of the hut was raised some feet higher than the floor. This was a kind of bed excavated by the chisel in the living rock, to the dimensions of a man. The vaulted rock was its ceiling. Instead of a mattress, it was covered with a litter of oat-straw, mixed with hay and fine mountain grass. A bundle of broom served as a pillow. Three or four black sheepskins rolled up at its foot, had served for blankets in winter. Beside this niche, there hung to a nail a woman's dress, seamed with velvet, and having a small cross of gold or brass upon the breast; it was the sole decoration of the hut,—the *lares* of the house, as it seemed. A little farther off, a small fireplace was seen against the rough stone wall, covered with a small quantity of the white ashes of broom. The smoke, which had blackened the grey stones in this place, evidently escaped through an opening between two blocks of granite, made by chance, but put to this use, and closed, when the fire was out, with a bundle of dry grass. The rest of the floor was entirely covered with a thick and clean litter of fresh heath and fern, upon which were im-

pressed in hollows the places which the dogs, goats, or kids, had weighed down with their bodies in the night. The whole store of provisions consisted of some bundles of last year's golden maize, the grains of which the peasants of these mountains roast under the ashes, which hung from a beam in the roof; some peeled chestnuts, dried in the oven, which they bake in milk; some small goats'-milk cheeses, as hard as the stones that they resemble in form, and a large loaf of rye bread, already cut, on which stains of mouldiness began to assume a white, woolly appearance. A knife, a stone pot for boiling potatoes, and a bottle, made of polished leather, with a long iron handle set in it, to draw up and drink water at the spring, were the only pieces of furniture, and the only utensils in the hut. I looked through the doorway, at my house, which shone on the horizon in the sun of the valley, with its extensive walls, its roofs, its towers, its large rooms, full of furniture, useful or useless, of all the servants, and all the appliances of a civilization insatiable in its wants and in the gratification of its factitious demands; I looked again at the personal possessions of Claude des Huttes, and went out, saying to myself:—

“Here, then, is the summary of a man's wants.”

VIII.

I shut the door and shouted again outside; but the hollow of the rock alone echoed the name of its tenant. Then I climbed up higher, and walked here and there to find the man and the goats. A path, imperceptible to every eye but a hunter's, revealed by slight footmarks in the turf, and by two or three fern leaves having been recently broken by a goat's horn, guided me to the back of a hill surrounded by grey stones, about a hundred paces above the waterfall. An enormous block of rock, like that which supported the old house, issued from the earth in the middle of this hill. Grass, as fine as silk velvet, grew around. I slowly made the tour of this rock, the summit of which appeared inaccessible without a ladder; then I found a crack between its two walls, and some irregular, natural steps, which facilitated the access. I climbed them, in order to discover from a higher elevation everything which could inhabit these peaks and

gorges, where earth, rock, and water seemed to try to hide themselves under the multiplied furrows of the strata. Having reached the summit, a gentle slope led me on the south side to the base of the rock, which I had believed to be inaccessible in every direction. There was a level space on this side, with a little enclosure of flowery green sward, all walled in with mossy rocks heaped on one another, like a small garden preserved by chance in the ruins of an ancient building. As I set my foot on this green sward, and cast a look round it, I saw all that I sought.

IX.

The turf lay on the same kind of slope that is given to a thatched roof, in order to allow the snow and rain to flow off it in winter; the mid-day sun which shone full upon it, reflected besides by the sandy prisms of the granite rocks with which it was walled in on every side, spread radiations and warm airs over it unusual at this height above the valleys. You breathed spring there. A cloud of insects floated and sported in the rays, which they made, so to speak, palpable. You felt that other guests besides man had discovered this asylum. Plants also multiplied at the foot of the rocks. Red pinks took root there, and waved over the mosses on the wall, like cherries half opened by the beaks of the birds. Eglantine in profusion formed a drapery for the beautiful spot; their long and flexible shoots threw out thousands of vegetable curves, at the extremities of which opened a star of roses, with five petals, which rained upon the turf. The grass, though wild, seemed to have been cleaned with a rake. The hunter, as he discovered this solitude within a solitude, at once lovely and severe, radiant and retired, walled in and flowery, was uncertain whether the portion of earth which lay under his eyes was an orchard, a garden, or a sanctuary of death adorned with flowers by the piety of a deserted village. It was, in fact, something which partook of both these characters,—a kind of funereal garden, where life disputed the soil with death; and seeing at the same moment the presence of grass, flowers, animals feeding, birds singing, and those hillocks of green turf, which seemed to be the folds of man's coverings in his last bed, I hesitated between

pain and pleasure, and stood looking on the whole in silence, without knowing whether to be glad or to be melancholy. Such was the first impression produced on me by this charming asylum of sunshine, silence, and repose.

X.

Hardly had I placed my foot on this flowery grass to make the tour of it, than a strange and inexplicable spectacle attracted my eyes, and suspended my steps. At the distance of twenty or thirty paces from where I stood, three great, worn blocks of grey granite, at the highest part of the green sward, were delineated upon the blue sky. One of them sprung from the earth like the upright shaft of a ruined pilaster; another was placed across, and in right angles with this shaft; the third, like the square trunk of a pedestal, rose from the middle of the second transversal block, and thus formed, whether by a natural chance, or by the intention of the constructor, a massive and flat-sided cross, the dimensions and weight of which seemed too great for the strength of man to have erected. One of the stone branches of this cross leaned to the left with so great an inclination, as to appear to indicate that this half-druidical monument was an irregular and unskilful sport of the elements, rather than the result of will. Was it this wild cross which had attracted the attention of the inhabitants of the huts, and caused them to group their seven or eight tombs around it? Was it these inhabitants who had brought together these hewn blocks in ancient times, to erect with them the sign of their death and their immortality? It was impossible to say. Little grey and white scales of lichen, darkened stains of the rain, green mosses of spring, other accidental growths that the winds sow with the dust of the earth and seeds of plants on large rocks, clothed these three blocks of granite with all kinds of saxillary vegetation, and with fine and variously-tinted velvets. Tufts of purple heath hung with their flowers downwards from the branches of the cross; a creeping ivy and some vigorous brambles interlaced each other in all directions on the principal shaft, and formed at the top a crown of tufted leaves, of twisted branches, of flowers, berries, and thorns,

which called to mind the crown, symbolic of sacrifice, upon the head of the just one who was crucified. Two kids, as white as snow, through the instinct which leads these creatures towards steep, had lain down opposite to each other, one on each of the transversal blocks of this cross, their forelegs folded under their bodies, and their bearded heads stretched upon the blue sky like an antique cornice.

I drew my dog's chain close to me, and signed to him with my finger to be silent, that he might not disturb the admirable grouping before my eyes, which had been thus arranged by chance and the caprice of the goats.

XI.

At the foot of this group of stones and animals slept Claude des Huttes, stretched on the grass. One of his arms bent under his head served him for a pillow; the other was extended, and rested on the back of a dog with long black silky hair by his side. One could see that he had fallen asleep while caressing it. The sun, not fierce nor burning, but temperate in heat, fell in his course towards the west full upon the man and dog, and seemed to penetrate them and melt them in his own fire, as though grass, stone, and living flesh must bless his rays equally. Beside the dog five or six sheep, whose winter coat of wool had not yet fallen under the shears, stood in a circle with their heads hanging down, and close together, like the spokes of a wheel upon the nave, to give each other the benefit of the shade of their bodies. A beautiful black and white she-goat, with a full udder, lay at Claude's feet in an attitude of repose, comfort, and complete security. She leaned her pretty head, ornamented with two long shining horns, upon the neck of a third little white kid without horns, lying between her legs.

The hoofs of these pretty creatures, polished by the grass, shone like black pebbles in the waters of a rivulet. The large eyes of the mother, vague, absent, and dreamy, like the eyes of the gazelle and the camel, seemed to think. They wandered by turns from the master to her little ones, from the dog to the sheep, from the rocks to the grass, as if she would have brought together voluptuously within her eye all the picture of peace of which she formed a part. Some

rabbits nibbled the wild thyme in the grass by the side of the dog, the goats, and the man, without being frightened even at my approach. One could see that Claude had taught his dog to regard them as part of the flock. Seven or eight plum, and two cherry-trees, with their thin trunks twisted by the wind, grew a few paces off under the shelter of a row of blocks of granite higher than the rest of the enclosure. Their blossoms, which, though late, were beginning to fall, rained down in flakes at each insensible breath of air. They made a floating shadow, intermingled with light upon the grass.

Nature knows how cold and tempestuous are the highest peaks of the mountains. There she only grows small trees with meagre foliage, the light and waving shadow of which is but a narrow, and transparent veil on the face of the earth. The shadow of the plum and cherry-trees in blossom did not reach as far as the feet of the sleeping mason. Against the blocks of stone, behind the trees, seven bee-hives, with a little pointed straw roof over them, might be seen mounted on as many stones, which served them as pedestals to protect them from damp during the rains. These bee-hives, full of swarms, emitted a low roaring sound, like a flame in a green wood; the bees, warmed by the sun, went out and in, in crowds, flying round the man and resting even on his arm and forehead without stinging him; for, like the domestic animals, they knew the hand that fed them. An immense ant-hill rose near the peasant's head. His stick would not demolish it, for it might not destroy a city built by those little architects of the good God, as he afterwards said to me. Legions of little, familiar lizards showed their pretty sprightly heads between the clefts of the stones, or pursued each other in the fine grass, without being afraid to pass over the feet, hands, and even the black hair of the man, and over the dog's paws. It was evident that a spirit of gentleness and love had established confidence and peace among all the things and all the beings in this little mountain colony.

XII.

I remained immoveable and involuntarily affected as I looked at all this. I now feared disturbing and bringing

trouble into the midst of it by awaking Claude, to question him. If I had been able to retire in silence, and without having been seen, I would have retraced my steps. But at the moment when I turned back to go and wait at the door of his hut for the time when the stonemason should awake and return home, his dog smelt mine. He rose on his haunches, looking towards me, and lifting up his muzzle in the air, as dogs do when they are in distress, or surprised by any unexpected object, he uttered a long howl of anguish and fear, to awaken his master. Claude rose up, looked towards me, knew me, and made some steps towards me with an air of visible embarrassment. I then came forward myself, smiling, in order to reassure him, and taking his hand :—"I see how it is, Claude," said I to him ; "you feel yourself in fault towards me, and are afraid that I may have come to reproach you with having deserted my work after it was begun. Be at ease ; sit down where you were there, in the midst of your family of goats, sheep, lizards, bees, and dog. All these are of the same family with ourselves,—is it not so ? I understand and love them as you do. Since the good God did not feel too great to make them, we ought not to feel ourselves too great to keep them company." The dog was silent, the goat did not rise from her place in the grass, the sheep continued to bleat with their heads between their legs, the lizards to run, the bees to murmur. We sat down in the sun opposite to one another, he on his green hillock, I on mine, our heads in the light of heaven, our feet in the grass, in furrow of a tomb closed and forgotten, under a green winding-sheet of turf embalmed with flowers, and held together the conversation I had desired with him.

CHAPTER IV.

I.

I. Why have you left my work, Claude ? Have you been ill ? or have you broken your tools ? or did you find the quarry intractable, and the blocks of stone brittle and friable under the hammer ?

He. No, sir, I have not been ill, I have not broken my tools, the quarry is easily worked, and the stone is sound; yet I have not ventured to tell you why I went away dishonestly, like a thief, without thanking you, without giving you notice, without asking for my wages,—because I felt myself to be faulty, and should never have been able to find good reasons for my conduct. But you will pardon me if I have given you trouble: it was not done willingly. On the contrary, I wished to serve you if I had been able, for your mother was well loved in the mountain, and they talk of her still there when they meet together in the evening.

I. Well! it is in my mother's name that I ask you to tell me why you will not work for me. Come, take courage: the souls of men are bells of the same metal; they give out, whether on the heights or at the base of the mountain, the same sound. What is just in your case will be just in mine. Speak to me as you would speak to God. How have you reconciled it to your conscience to go away and leave me thus in embarrassment?

He. Well, sir, this is the matter. I said to myself: "Claude, you will not work for money; this is your private feeling,—your fancy; no one has anything to do with it, that is true. You work for the poor when they have no one else to do their work. At this moment there are no poor people who want your service; you work for the gentleman of the chateau; you will only take your food from him—it is well." And I went on working happily for five days; my stones are at the edge of the quarry; you can see them. Nevertheless, I was not easy in my mind while doing my work; something within me reproached me with I did not well know what, when, on the sixth day, while eating my bread in the morning, sitting on the stone I was hewing, a thought came upon me like a flash of lightning in my eyes. I said to myself, "You are working at a cheap rate for this rich family: it is well for it and well for you, who have only your dog to feed; but there are in the country, in the villages on the other side of the mountain, stonemasons who have a father and mother, wife and children to lodge, to keep warm, to clothe, to feed, and to bring up with their daily wages. Who employs them?—the rich. Now, if you work without wages for the rich, who will employ the poor

workmen of your class who are sons or fathers of a family ? And if they have no work, who will feed their children ? While you believe that you are doing a charitable action here, you are stealing the bread and the life of your comrades." This struck me as if a stone had been thrown at my head and ear. I threw down my piece of bread, I put my pickaxe, large hammer, and matting-hammer in my bag, and set off towards my house as if I had done some wicked deed. Was I wrong, sir, to think of my poor married comrades ? and was it not their bread that I was eating ?

J. No, Claude, you were not wrong ; you reasoned rightly, you felt rightly, and I willingly pardon you. But tell me also who it is that has made your judgment so clear and your conscience so delicate, that your duties of justice and charity towards your neighbour always prevail over your own interest, and that you think of others before thinking of yourself ?

He. I do not know, sir ; I think that the good God has made me so.

J. You have, then, studied in your childhood, and learned your religion from some curé of the neighbourhood, a relation of your family, or in some seminary, whence these ideas concerning God, your neighbour, and Christian perfection have remained in the depths of your soul, to be developed afterwards in works of charity ?

He. No, sir, I have never studied, either with a curé or in a seminary ; my father and mother were too poor for that. Besides, when I was at the proper age for learning, there were not even curés in the parishes, or bells in the steeples. I have learned nothing of religion, except the three or four prayers that my mother knew by heart, and that she made us say after her when the fire was put out at home. I do not even know how to read and write, and I reckon my money with straws and pebbles.

J. But, then, how did your mind become formed all alone ?

He. Are we alone, sir, when we have the good God always present above us or before us ? I have never felt alone in my life.

J. You are right. But how have you been raised up yourself, and accustomed to this presence of the good C

which peoples the desert for you, and converses with you like an invisible friend ?

He. I do not know any more, sir ; I think it is his goodness towards me that, seeing I was destined to live so high up here, without wife or children, father or mother, he comes to visit me oftener than other people, to console me, and prevent me from becoming weary of life.

I. You do not become very weary of life, then, in this hermitage, in the midst of snows and tempests, silence and solitude ?

He. Oh, no, sir ! I am never weary. Can one feel weary in the society of him who knows everything, who says everything, who hears all that we have to say to him, and who is never tired of hearing us and answering us in our hearts ?

I. No ; but it requires great concentration of mind, and great elevation of the spirit, not to be distracted from this inward conversation with the good God, not to be deafened by the noise of the world, and dragged into the current of trifling thoughts. In a word, it requires that we should be endowed with a peculiar sense,—a sense which is common to all men, but which is not developed in all in the same degree,—a sense more intellectual and more divine than all others,—the sense of the infinite, the sense of God. In other words, my poor Claude, it seems that you have in a superior degree this sense of God, the gift of gifts, the sovereign intelligence in the learned or the ignorant, the sovereign wealth among the rich or among the poor, the sovereign felicity with the happy and the unhappy. I believed I discovered it in you when I saw and spoke with you the other day. I come out from among people more educated and of higher rank than you ; but I respect you, I envy and admire you, and it was to hear this superior sense speak from the lips of a simple artizan that I said to myself : Let me go up there ; God reveals himself sometimes in burning bushes ; more peace, light, and serenity is always found in proportion as we leave the valleys where men swarm, and rise towards the heights where their din ceases.

He. Ah, sir, you have deceived yourself ; I have not even a single word upon my tongue. I remain sometimes, on the contrary, a whole week without speaking. The good

God would have done well to make me dumb ; for, except to call my goats, my sheep, and my dog, by their names, I have never felt the need of speaking.

I. There are souls so full of thoughts and feelings that they cannot pour them out. Perhaps it is thus with yours.

He. Oh, I do not believe it, sir ; I say nothing, because I have nothing to say. It is even partly on this account that I do not go down and live among other people. I say to myself,—What would you do down there ? You do not even know how to answer when the children look at you at work, and ask you the name of your tools.

I. But then something speaks within you when you are silent ? For, indeed, God has given to every soul the necessity of sympathy, the need of hearing and of answering, as he has given to air, water, and flame, the necessity of motion, of supply from the source, and of spreading upwards, unless they would be exhausted or extinguished.

He. That is true, sir ; there is some one who breathes, who moves, who flows, who burns, who converses unknown to me, constantly with me. I feel him well, I hear him well ; sometimes, even, I answer him in my heart. But it is a speech without words, which we understand without having been at school, and read without having learned to read in books. It is low and indistinct, like the sound of deep water in the pools of the abyss, and, nevertheless, it keeps me company, and consoles me like a woman, or like a friend by the chimney-corner at night. Without this conversation, should I not have been dead many years since ?

He stopped and sighed as he involuntarily cast a look towards one of those green hillocks, which had struck me as I entered the enclosure. I saw that there was in him an association with that which lay under the grass, and that he feared to touch upon it before me. I would not do violence to his mystery on my first day of intercourse with him. I did not show that I had observed his interruption and surprised his sigh.

I. And concerning what does this inward murmur, which thus converses with you, usually speak to you ?

He. We speak of all that I see on the earth, sir, and above, he added, pointing to the field of the stars over our heads. Above all, we speak of Him.

I. Of him ! whom ?

He. The good God, sir.

I. But if you have never been at school, nor learned the catechism, which was not taught in your childhood, nor have read books where God is spoken of, how do you know even that a God exists ?

He. Ah ! sir, first our mother told us so, and then afterwards, when I grew up, I knew many good souls who took me to houses of prayer where people assemble to adore him and serve him together, and to listen to the words that he has commissioned his saints to reveal to men in his name. But, even though my mother had not spoken of him to me, and even though I had never heard the catechism taught in the parishes when I made my tour of France, is there not a catechism in everything that surrounds us, which instructs the eyes and the soul of the most ignorant ? Are the letters of the alphabet required to enable us to read his name ? Does not the idea of him enter our eyes with the first ray of light, into our spirit with our first reflection, into our heart with our first emotion ? I do not know how other men are made, sir ; but, as to me, I could not see, I do not say a star, but even an insect, the leaf of a tree, a grain of sand, without saying to it "Who was it that made thee ?"

I. And you answer to yourself : it was God.

He. You say well, sir ; it could not make itself ; for before making anything, it must be : is it not so ? And before being, it was not ; it could not, therefore, make itself. Nothing is more true than that. At least, this is how I put the case ; but you must know how to put it in many ways more learned than this.

I. No ; all ways of putting it terminate in yours. It may be said in more words, but not with more truth. Effects without a cause ; an immense chain which should ascend and descend even to the infinitude of the heights and depths of space, which should bear worlds and worlds suspended in every direction to its innumerable rings, and which should have no first link ! Behold the world without God, my poor Claude. A confusion that you would not speak of before your dog for fear of revolting the instinct of an animal ; is it not so ? Those who do not see God have never appeared to me to be men. They are in my eyes beings of a separate

species, born to contradict the creation, to say no, where all nature says, yes ; intellectual shadows whom God has created, to make the splendour of the evidence of himself shine the brighter by the absurdity of their blindness. They do not shock me, they make me sorrowful ; I do not hate them, I pity them ; they are the blind of soul : God will give them eyes.

He. Are there men like this ?

I. They say so ; I have never believed it. Have you not, however, heard of living men whose skin is dead, who neither feel heat nor cold, water nor fire, nor the thousand impressions which the air communicates to our skins, both pleasurable and painful ?

He. Yes ; those unfortunate people whom, in our mountains, they call lepers.

I. Well, since there are men who have not received the sense of touch in their outward form, it may be believed that there are some who have not received the power of judgment and feeling in their inward being. Those who do not see God, if they exist, would be the lepers of the spirit.

He. God is too good to leave them in this darkness.

I. How do you know that God is good ?

He. Because we love that which is good, and if God were not good, we could not prevent ourselves from hating him. Now I ask you, sir, who appear to understand this much better than I, what would a creation be in which the creature could not help hating his creator ? It would be a contradiction. The creature would love good by nature, and the creator, who made him to raise him to himself and to love him, would be evil ! you see that this is the world turned upside down, and our ideas all embroiled and perplexed. We do not rest in such a thought, except for a moment when we are suffering very much, and forget his justice and our hope in him. But it is a cry which escapes the lips, and after which the soul hurries to catch it before God has heard it.

And then, sir, that which is above all great and wonderful, is it not the vast amount of justice and goodness throughout nature ? And since he has put into us, who proceed from him, and who are only his distant and dark image, justice and goodness as things that we love whether we will or no,

is not this a proof that he possesses them himself beyond measure? Must it not be a necessity that he is infinitely good, since he wills to be infinitely loved by all that proceeds from his hands? This, at least, is what I say to myself sometimes when life is difficult, and I am full of sorrow. But I seldom have occasion to reason in this way; I see him too well, I feel him too well. I touch him, if I may dare to say so, too nearly, heart to heart, to commit towards him the outrage and ingratitude of believing him wicked.

But think for a moment how this could be, sir; I, a poor worm of the earth, that I could be good, and God could be evil? The reflection be fire, and the sun ice? Truly, I am ashamed of my comrades who have sometimes spoken these follies to me.

I. You feel, then, within you, a vast and grateful love of the good God?

He. Alas! sir, not so much as I would, nor as I ought. I have not knowledge enough to understand the perfections of this invisible father, and to bathe my spirit in the depths of his goodness. I see him exactly as might one of these rough and black stones which are warmed by the sun as long as he shines upon them. If I were like one of those mirrors that I have seen shining at the end of the rooms in your chateau, I should be much more thoroughly warmed, that is to say, I should love him much more. Love must be great in proportion as mind is great. I am a poor man, I cannot possess such power of admiration as a learned man.

I. And how is that?

He. He created me.

I. But it cost him nothing.

He. It cost him a thought,—a thought of God, sir! Have we ever thought enough of that? As to me, I often reflect upon it, and I become as proud as a god in my humility, as great as the world in my littleness! A thought of God! But that is worth as much to me as if he had given me the whole universe. For, indeed, sir, though I am but a small thing, yet in order to create me, it must be that he thought of me,—of me who did not yet exist, that he saw me from afar, that he gave me life beforehand, that he reserved my little space for me, my little moment, my little weight, my little work, my birth, my death, and—I feel it, sir—my

immortality. What! is that nothing, sir? nothing to have filled one thought of God, and to have filled it so that he should have deigned to create you? Ah! I repeat it to you, when I think of this, nothing but this, sir, nothing but this, when I think of it, it builds up the love of God within me.

He stopped, as if breathless with emotion, and bent down his head upon his two large hands, as if to reflect. His eyes were wet when he opened them. I had been astonished, as I listened to him, to perceive how an idea so powerful and just, though so simple, had lent expressions to this man of silence, such as I, a man practised in eloquence, could scarcely have equalled for aptness and impressiveness.

I. But what idea have you of this good God, whom you love so much, my poor Claude?

He. Ah! sir, I have thought, I have thought, I have thought of this ever since I came into the world, and I have not been able yet to satisfy myself with the smallest shadow of an idea. My weak spirit has in vain swelled within my head, as though it would break the walls of my forehead, to rush out of its prison, and extend to the dimensions of all the worlds;—it is always like nothing in the presence of everything. It is not equal to a grain of dust of his greatness, a minute of his duration, a drop of water in the sea of his perfections; these weigh like a hundred thousand mountains of this granite on the wing of one of these little flies; they overwhelm the soul of a poor man, they would overwhelm the united souls of all the creatures who have ever lived, who live now, or will live to eternity.

We must not think to make to ourselves an idea of him, sir; an idea of God! To have this, one must be God oneself. An image I do not say one cannot have. I sometimes make thousands of images; sometimes one, sometimes another, which satisfy me for a moment, and comfort my spirit like a plank which comforts a drowning man for an instant; but it does not long give support; it sinks under you, and your spirit is drowned eternally in this contemplation.

I. And what images come to you most frequently, Claude?

He. Oh, sir, it would be easier to count the grains of dust that fly off from the stone under my hammer during a summer's day, and that the wind blows into my eyes. Sometimes I see him like a sky without end, sown with eyes in

every direction, which envelopes the world, and enlarges in proportion as more are thrown into it, seeming always empty though always full! Sometimes I see him like an ocean without shores, out of which proceed innumerable islands and continents. Sometimes I see him like a giant who is loaded for ever with mountains, seas, suns, and worlds heaped one on the other, and who does not even feel their weight. Sometimes I see him like a dial drawn on the sky in cyphers of suns, the hand of which lengthens, lengthens, lengthens without end towards the edge of the dial, without ever reaching it. Sometimes I see him like an infinite eye, wider open than the sky over his works, on which he looks, increasing as he creates them, in order to embrace them all. Sometimes like an immeasurable hand, which bears us all, and brings us nearer to his face to enlighten us, and to his breath to warm us. Sometimes like a heart, which beats in all his works, from the greatest to the least! In short, what can I say to you, sir? Though I were to recount to you these foolish thoughts, arising out of the ignorance of a poor man, till the breath of each of us was exhausted, they would still be always and for ever nothing but follies, shadows of a bird's wing on the sun, the light of a glow-worm beside the stars! It is all nothingness. I feel it as much as you do. And I never rest in it a minute. There is only one thing that a little satisfies me, and it is so foolish I scarcely dare tell it you.

I. Tell it me also, Claude. One of us has not more intelligence than another in the presence of the impossible to conceive and the impossible to express.

He. Well, sir, it is this. I lie down in summer, in the middle of the day, in the grass or the sand, on my back, with my eyes half closed and turned towards the rays which fall from the sky on my face; in this manner there rains into my eyes and into my soul a dazzling flood of rays as rosy as the flowers of the eglantine. This flows, illumines, warms me to the depths of my heart, as if one were plunged into a lake of light, which entered into one's limbs and veins, and even into one's spirit. Then, sir, I figure to myself that these rays, this dazzling light, this warmth, is the ocean of God in which I swim, and that I am carried deliciously across space, light and transparent as the air, to I know not

where—it is a grief to me when I open my eyes and only see the sun. I thought that it was He; and I am ready to weep at having lost the feeling of his presence. But I make you laugh, sir! What would you have! We are all children when we are seeking our father! He has hidden himself too high for our hands and our eyes. We all stammer as we call him and seek him; we only embrace his shadow! No matter, he continued, casting a look towards the green hillock on which I was seated, to be deceived is still to love; is it not?

I. Yes, Claude, we can only reach to the extent our hands can stretch; we can only comprehend to the height of our spirits. God wills that you and I should feel the distance that nothing can measure between him and us. Whenever we try to fill it up with our dreams or our images, we fill it with our follies, our audacities, or our idols! Let it suffice us to feel him, to hope in him, to love him; as to understanding him, the sun itself, if the sun is the intelligence of heaven, would be extinguished there!

He. Well said, sir! the sun would be extinguished there; what would become of us? Let us be satisfied to do his will during this little moment on the earth.

I. But how are you sure, Claude, that you do the will of the good God?

He. Ah! as to that, sir, it is different; I know nothing of it, but I am sure.

I. But, once more, how are you sure of it?

He. How, sir? Because I have here, in my heart, and not in my head—the head has vertigoes, the head deceives, as we say; but the heart never goes round, and the conscience does not deceive;—because I have here (striking his breast) a heart and a conscience, which have two voices, low but clear, and which say to me, this is good, this is bad, this is just, this is unjust, this is right, this is wrong; and that which is good, just, and right,—that is the will of God.

I. And how do you know this, once more?

He. I repeat to you, sir, that I have no need to know it, because I feel it. When I hurt myself with my hammer, and my flesh suffers and bleeds, I have no need to prove that I have hurt myself: is it not so? I simply feel it. Well! in the same way, when I have hurt my soul by not following

the will of God, I do not need to prove it to myself ; I feel it strongly enough, and my soul cries and bleeds within me, like my flesh under my hammer. That which is felt, sir, is much more sure than that which is known. Man makes his own reasoning, but it is God who makes our feelings. A feeling, sir, is a reasoning ready-made. A gentleman like you said this clearly to me one day. It is man who thinks, said he to me, but it is nature which feels. Distrust your thoughts, but believe firmly in your feelings ; for nature knows more than you or me. She has heard God before us, and nearer than we have : do you understand ?

I. This gentleman was right ; but have you much difficulty, Claude, in thus doing as much as you can the will of God ?

He. On the contrary, sir, it is my heaven upon earth.

I. And in what does this will consist in your case ?

He. In loving all that he has made, sir, in order to love him himself in his works ; and in serving all, in order to serve him himself in all the world.

I. But to love all, and to serve all, with a view to love and to serve the author of all, this is sometimes hard to do ; for, indeed, there are people and things that it is difficult to love, and we are often much tempted to serve ourselves instead of serving others.

He. Well, sir, they have often said that to me in the towns down below, and the villages here ; it must be true, and yet I do not say so to boast, be sure of that, but I have never understood it.

I. What, Claude, it has never been difficult to you to love everybody, and to sacrifice yourself like another Christ for all the world ? You are, then, an abyss of love and renunciation.

He. I, sir ! Oh ! I am the last of the last among others. I feel it well, look you, and I hide myself as well as I can here with my poor animals, not to cause too much shame to my equals in the country by my poverty of spirit ; but as to having any difficulty in loving, I should lie if I said I had. It appears that the good God, who has refused me mind, and many other things, he added with a sigh, but ill concealed, has given me grace to possess in this direction, what he has taken from me in all others. I have never felt hatred within me against my neighbours of every kind.

I. What do you mean by your neighbours of every kind?

He. I understand, sir: I mean to say, men, animals, and even trees and plants, everything that is related to us in body or soul, in short, sir, here below; everything which is near to us; everything which inhabits, or which composes this world where God has placed us, as I have placed these animals in this enclosure, to live in peace and unity around me.

I. You love all that?

He. Ah! I should love much besides, if I knew more. I do not know how the good God has made my heart, sir, but it is always full, and yet always empty.

I. You would say, it is infinite.

He. Perhaps, sir, I mean what you call by that name. Whatever it is, nothing can altogether fill it. The good God might throw worlds into it to make me love them, but I think there might still be room in it to hold and to love others. Ah! of all the favours that He shows towards us, above all, towards us poor men who are alone, the greatest is this inclination to love everything. It is like a warm spring, which flows continually from the heart, sir, and which, after having watered this place, goes to water that, and which never ceases to flow. It is this gift from the good God that good souls call pity, sir! Pity for the afflicted, for the guilty, for the poor, for the rich, for the old, for widows, for children, for men, for animals, for plants, for the earth even, and for the stars of heaven, if these elements themselves possess sensibility, whether dull or lively, and if all feel, cry, and suffer in their way as we do. Alas, sir, I believe this is what the good God commands and inspires the most in us men. For without this pity for one another, what would become of us all in a world so kneaded with affections?

I. God preserve me from contradicting you, Claude! You see that in all religions the most holy and most divine victims are they who have felt most of this pity, which is only a movement of love for our fellow-creatures, and have sacrificed themselves to purchase a truth or a virtue for the human race. That which is most generous in the heart of man is pity, Claude! To weep for the sufferings of others is to make our hearts bleed for the evils whence we might have

turned away our eyes. After his blood, that which a man can next give out of himself, is a tear. Is it not a drop out of his own heart, which he lets fall on the heart of another, in order to heal it? The pity of which you speak, is the most beautiful form of love; for this is a love which seeks after you in order to live with you,—this is the love of the senses; but there is a love which pursues you to suffer with you and to share your troubles; it is a beautiful affection, that love, but it makes those suffer much who are gifted with it.

He. That is true, sir; but it makes them enjoy much also. As to me, the love that I have always felt for those who are in sorrow has often made me go late to rest, and wake again before day. I said to myself, you are quiet and warm in your house, with your dog and your goats. There is bread for you upon the shelf, there is grass on the mountain or in the rack for them; your roof, though it is of broom, is well repaired, and can resist the snow and the rain; you have no care concerning your wife or your children; but there is such a one whose tiles have been crushed by his floor having given way, and his bed and the cradles of his little ones are exposed to every wind; there is that poor widow, whose house was burned last week, and who has not a single farthing to pay for the stones, the mason, and the tiler, to build her another place of shelter; there is that old man who no longer has his son to dig up his piece of land with the pickaxe; there are those three orphans, who have no father nor mother to mow their rye, or thrash their chestnut-tree; there is such a one's chimney fallen down; there is the doorway, or a beam, or a staircase, or a window, belonging to this person or that, has given way or been broken, and so they are obliged to run after the mason in vain, with no money from this year to next to pay him his day's work. What will they do in the hard weather that is coming on? Who will go to their assistance for the love of God? Come, I will go! Let me take some trouble, to save them a little. I will hew some stones for one, cut a doorway for another, put the steps of the staircase to rights for another, replace the rafters and tiles for another, dig the earth with the pickaxe round my sick neighbour's vine, cut barley for that blind old woman, milk my goat for that poor nurse whose cow has

fallen down into the ravine, and who has no milk for her nurselings. The little that I can do for them will ease their hearts ; they will have less sorrow in the house ; they will sleep to-night ; they will eat this evening ; they will lie down in safety under shelter before winter.

And I go to them, sir ; and even to see me set to work, often without saying a word to them, consoles them and rejoices them ; they come to look at me working ; they sit down at the edge of the quarry or the tool-board ; the children play with my tools, or with my dog when he has followed me. They think, Providence has not abandoned us ; Claude has heard of our misfortune ; poor fellow, he cannot do much, but he does the little he can. It makes their heart lighter, that a neighbour shares their trouble with them ; and as to me, sir, the idea that it comforts them makes the hammer lighter in my hand ; and in the evening, when I come up here again, as night closes in, I say to myself, Claude, what have you earned to-day ? and I answer, I have earned a good day's wages,—for the poor people pay me in love, my heart pays me in contentment, and the good God will pay me in mercy ! Is it not true, sir, that this is well worth the half-crown that would have been a trouble to them to give, and to me to receive. I say to myself, as I go to sleep, there will be a grief the less in the village to-night.

I. And it makes you happy to feel that you have deserved well of him who commands us to help one another.

He. Oh, sir, I have deserved nothing at all for that, because it is a pleasure I have done to myself. I have told you I cannot feel that any one or anything is suffering, without its gnawing my heart, and increasing my longing to make whatever is around me happy. It seems to me that I am one with all men, sir ; that they are a part of my own flesh, and that I am a part of theirs. I think that this is what they call love, is it not ?

I. Yes, certainly ; and in the most pure and divine sense of that word.

He. Oh, if it is so, sir, I do not know whether I ought to boast or be humiliated for it ; but I have enough of it for two.

I. And for a hundred, my poor Claude. You might give some of it to those who are cold at heart.

He. But perhaps I have too much of it, sir ; and perhaps it is not right to love so much all that I love, almost as much as I do my neighbour.

I. And whom do you love so much, then, besides God and men, whom we cannot love too much ?

He. I shall never dare to tell you, and nevertheless it is so.

I. Tell me boldly. To love too much is seldom a crime before God. A vase can never be full without some drops falling on the ground.

He. Very well ! Yes, sir ; when I have loved well and served well, according to my power, the good God and men, —shall I venture to confess it to you ?—I feel a foolish tenderness, but a tenderness that I cannot conquer, for all the rest of the creation, especially for all those living creatures of another species, who live beside us on the earth, who see the same sun, who breathe the same air, who drink the same water, who are formed of the same flesh under other forms, and who appear truly less perfect members, less well-endowed by our common father, but still members of the great family of God. I mean these animals, these dogs, who are such good and faithful servants, that for wages a thousand times higher, they would never leave the poor master to whom they have devoted themselves ; of these goats, kids, and sheep, that climb up in the evening, even to the very top of this crag, to see me coming from a distance to the hut ; that call me as if they knew that their bleating would hasten my return to them ; and rush down to make me welcome as soon as I have crossed the cultivated fields, and begin to enter the wild heaths, where I let them feed and bound about at liberty ; of these birds that have seen me, when they were quite little and without feathers, respect their nests and crumble my bread for their sitting parents to carry to them in their beaks ; of these bees whose winter store of food I leave to them, and only take a little honey, enough for the sick ; of these lizards that the noise of the stone sounding under the hammer attracts like a bell round me all day long, and that I never crush under my feet ; and all the least insects, the dwellers in leaves, stones, and grasses, whom I never injure, because I see in them the work of the good God which it is not permitted to us to destroy wantonly.

It will make you laugh, sir, to hear me say it, but if you were to see how we talk to one another when we are alone, and understand each other's words and looks! How the goats, lying under my feet, fix their deep and pensive eyes on mine! How the dog, when he watches them during my absence, is at once gentle and strict with them, and barks at them without doing them any harm, to prevent them from leaping over the wall of the enclosure; how the bees caress my face and hands with their velvet feet, without ever stinging me, when I am managing their swarms, or when I lie down on Sunday on this grass, which is their table, where their repast is spread out; how the rabbits follow the dog in the evening when he brings them back to the hut; how prettily the lizards frisk and leap about even over my arms and my neck, and raise their little heads to see, by my eyes, if I am angry with them when they eat my bread! If you could hear our evening conversations in the hut, when the dog, the kids, and sheep, play so amicably among themselves and with me, as if to drive away all dullness. If you could see those trustful heads resting side by side upon my knees, and those eyes which exchange so many thoughts with mine, not spoken in words, but understood by me! Ah! I assure you, sir, that you could not help wishing to love these poor animals too, for love deserves love, sir, whether it comes from high or low! Does not God permit us to love him? Is there most difference between my goats and me, or between me and God?

And then, though you should tell me that it is foolish to love the good God's animals, and to make them happy in their poor conditions, I cannot help it; I have no power not to do it. The heart is like water. It flows where it wills.

But do not think that this is the whole of my simplicity; I have much besides. Would you believe that, not content with feeling this tenderness and compassion for animals that can move about, that feel and that have intelligence suited to their condition, I feel it also for trees, flowers, and mosses, that do not move from their place, and do not appear to think, but live and die there round me on the earth, and especially for those that I have known, like the ferns and heaths on the edges of these rocks in this enclosure, when I was young, and above all, added he more tenderly, for these

trefoils, with their blue flowers and leaves full of dew in the morning, as if they had wept with us during the night, and that grow over the graves of those of former days?

There was a slight tremulousness in his voice as he spoke the last words. I did not appear to perceive it. He continued in a tone of rustic but true inspiration:—

Yes, sir, there is not one of those stars above in the sky, which begin to rise in the twilight above the rocks; not one of those mountain tops, not one of those hills reflecting the setting sun, not one of the ravines hidden in the depths of those gorges, with their waters that sleep or boil in their gloom, not one of those clods of earth, turned up again and again by my pickaxe since my infancy, for which I do not feel a fund of attachment in my heart, which often makes me nearly shed tears when I look at them on my return to Les Huttes. Is this surprising? Have we not, as I sometimes say to myself, a true relationship with this earth whence we spring, whither we shall return, which bears us, which gives us drink and food, like our nurse? Is not our flesh of its substance? Is not our blood the water of its veins? Is there not between her and us a true relationship of body, so that when we take up a handful of sand, or a clod of earth from the hillocks which have borne our weight, we can say to this grain of sand, "Thou art my brother;" and to that clod of earth, "Thou art my mother or my sister?" And does not the earth seem to love us also, and to say to us, "Yes, I know you; you are of me; each of your limbs and your bones, it was I who gave them to you! I am proud of you as a mother is of her children, as I am proud of this beech; pine, or chestnut-tree, which they come to admire on my slopes! You would be ungrateful if you did not love me, if my memory and my image did not pursue you, when you are far from me, in other lands, and did not recall to you in your dreams of the night, the hill which bore you?" Is not this true, sir? Is it not a little of this, which, in the language of cities, they call patriotism? Is it not for this reason, also, that men make pilgrimages into distant places, to visit the land where men greater than themselves, men, whose names are more famous or more holy than others, have formerly lived, and to kiss the dust of their feet upon the soil of the mountains which they trod? Excuse me, sir, I speak like

an ignorant man, but you ask me what I think, and I must tell you.

Very well, there are moments, on Sundays in the fine weather, when, lying in the sun, on this earth that feels, and seems to return the beating of my heart, pressing handful of grass in my hands, my face buried in the mallows and trefoils of this little enclosure, with the murmuring of these thousands of insects in my ears; with the breath of this crowd of small, almost invisible, flowers of the spring among the mosses, on my cheeks, I feel shudderings of life and death over my whole body, as if God had really touched me with the end of one of his sun's rays; as if my father, mother, sisters, all those I loved, came to life again, and gasped under the grass, in the earth, and recognized me, and drew me towards them. Oh! who would not love a piece of ground where he had deposited his treasure, and which keeps it for him for the resurrection?

A large tear rolled down his cheek, without his perceiving it. I saw that there was a love within this love; some especial worship and hope in this universal and pious worship of the creation.

I. But, loving as you are, Claude, does not this solitude—without wife, children, or neighbours—on these heights, where the wind only rises with you, does it not make you melancholy?

He. No, sir, quite the contrary, I am melancholy when I am below; I become gay and happy when I come up again. Men make too much noise for my weak spirit, which only understands itself in silence; their noise drives away God from me; it seems to me that I am less in his company when I am in the villages. I verily believe that the good God loves the mountains best.

I. However, he also made the plains and the valleys.

He. True; but the mountains are nearer heaven.

I. But is there not, Claude, another reason that you do not tell me, and which makes you live alone here with your goats and sheep, and makes you travel two leagues in going down and two leagues in returning every day to come back to your ancient habitation.

He (rising and looking at the grassy graves). It is true, sir; but do not let us speak of that, it would give you pain,

and me also. The sun has quite gone down behind the mountain that is darkened by your woods. You will only have time to reach them before the black night comes over the valley.

I. I forgot it as I talked to you. Claude, when we have discovered a good spring in the shade, as we walk through these solitudes, we sometimes forget more than time would have had us forget. I have done so to-day. I forgive you for having left my work; forgive me in your turn for having disturbed your Sunday's rest. I will come again, from time to time, if my coming does not trouble you, to talk with you of God, and even to pray to him with you, in your language, Claude. For I am very far from living in perpetual communion with him, like you; still farther from keeping a sanctuary for him in my soul so pure and clear of earthly vanities as that which he has prepared for himself in your solitude and repose. My soul rushes forward upon the waves of an agitated and noisy life; all that rushes, foams: but under the foam on the surface of my life, I have, like the hollows in the rocks at the bottom of your ravine, kept some drops of clear water in my soul, in which I love to be able to preserve the reflection of one corner of the sky, and to contemplate, like you, the floating clouds of God. I do not serve him with all my strength like you; still I love him, and pray to him with all my heart and all my mind. Sometimes I even sing hymns to him. But my song is not of equal value with yours, Claude; my hymns are words that fill the ear; yours are deeds that serve men. I am only worthy to converse with you because I have always felt an appreciation of souls, which are the habitation of a divine simplicity and virtue. Farewell, then, but only till we meet again, when chance or the chase may bring me back to Les Huttes.

I went out of the enclosure, he accompanying me to the end of the ruined village. His dog, his sheep, his goats, and the rabbits even, followed him as if he had called them. These tame animals appeared to make a group around him, and to understand his love for them. I should not have been surprised to see him followed by the bees and insects. This man would have trained the rocks and trees. He and all nature, animate and inanimate, seemed to understand, to

live with, and to love one another, in pious and mysterious intelligence, at the feet of their God.

CHAPTER V.

I.

I DESCENDED the mountain in a state of peaceful thought, like that which I used to carry away with me in my youth when I left my mother in the garden, after hearing her utter her pious meditations on God, aloud, with her little children. I still heard in my soul the words, so simple, yet so full of divine meaning, of that poor disciple of solitude. Even the sound of his voice rang in my ears like the sound of the bells in the elevated villages of the Alps, which vibrate above the mists of the valley, and the sole function of which is to awaken thoughts of God in the souls of the inhabitants, the *sursum corda* of the woodcutters, mowers, and shepherds of the mountains. I felt better, warmer at heart, and more inclined towards goodness, simply by having been for a few moments near that shepherd's hearth, hidden behind the rocks and bushes. Every man has an atmosphere that surrounds him, and spreads around him good or evil influences, genial warmth or ice, according as his soul is more or less inclined heavenwards, and reflects more or less of the divinity within him. Repulsion and attraction result solely from the power of this atmosphere of men upon us. Some attract us like the magnet, others repel us like the serpent, without our knowing why. But nature, she knows it; we ought to listen to these repulsions and attractions, as sensations and warnings of the instinct of the soul. Attraction almost always reveals hidden virtue; repulsion, some vice concealed within the beings who inspire it in us. Souls have their physiognomies as well as faces. We do not analyze them, we feel them. Who has not said, while drawing near certain men, "I feel myself better near him?"

II.

I restrained my impatience to see Claude again, and to

converse with him once more, during the whole week, in the fear of disturbing him in his work on any of the days of labour, and so hindering the good deeds toward his neighbour, with which he filled up his days. But when Sunday came, I went up again to Les Huttes, so to speak, instinctively, and found Claude in the same place where I had left him. Only, this time, he was not asleep in the sun, in the midst of his flowery grass. He had mowed the thin crop on the green sward during the week, and was raking the dry and scented hay together into small cocks, which he meant to carry under the shelter of his hut, at his leisure, to feed his animals in the winter. As there had been a heavy dew in the morning, he feared some violent rains might fall towards evening or next day, and therefore had heaped up his harvest of hay, that it might not be washed away. He seemed to see me again with pleasure. I deposited my shooting-coat on a stone, and helped him to finish his work, as if I had been a haymaker by trade. He made no attempts to prevent me. Before noon all the hay was in cock here and there on the shaven slope of the little meadow. He offered me a piece of his rye bread and one of his little goats'-milk cheeses, the relishing food of the peasant throughout our mountains. I shared this bread of my infancy with him with a sensation of pleasure. Our meal, moistened with ice-cold water from the spring, drawn up in a gourd, and the juice of some precocious cherries that had been blighted, and had fallen from the tree before their time, gave rise to a feeling of familiarity between us. When people have eaten and drank together, they are associated in fellowship, according to the language and manners of the country. We sat down under one of the haycocks, the top of which gave a little shade to our heads, and resumed the conversation of the previous Sunday.

III.

I. You have not told me, Claude, why this hamlet of Les Huttes, of which you are now the sole inhabitant, was thus abandoned to briars and ivy; and why all the men, women, and children disappeared, as water rushes out of a sluice when a storm carries away the dam, leaving the fish dead in the dry sand at the bottom. Neither have you told me who

anciently rolled these great rough stones round this little retired spot of earth, built this cross, composed of three blocks, and raised the five or six turfy mounds that you do not mow like the rest, and that so closely resemble the tombs in the cemetery of Saint Point, that I see grow green under my window?

He. What would you have me tell you, sir? The earth speaks plainly herself. Where the ridge of a furrow is seen, it is easy to know that there have been an ear of corn and a red poppy, is it not? Where sepulchres are to be seen, it is easy to know that there have been men and women. This enclosure was formerly the cemetery of Les Huttes. It had been selected, because it is the only spot in the mountain where the soil is deep enough to cover a coffin. It was seldom that a grave was dug in it, for there were only three houses in the hamlet, which contained only one united family. Every ten or fifteen years, perhaps, they laid an old man or a child here. They cultivated the ground all around, respecting only the spot of earth where the last was buried, as the cradle stands by the bed in our cottages. I have often heard my grandfather tell how he saw the great cross built in his childhood, with those three stones, which thirty men of the present day could not place one on the other. They found the first standing as it does now in the earth, like the trunk of a chestnut-tree of a thousand years, without a head, that had been rent asunder by the wind at the spot where the branches grew: It is not known whether it is one of the bones of the earth that has pierced the skin, or if it is a fragment that fell from that summit, and buried its base in a deep hole made by its own weight. It suggested the idea of placing another across it, and then a shorter one above, to make a cross, which might be seen from afar above the snow by shepherds and hunters. They heaped up earth in the form of a road from the rocks you see there, to the top of the trunk of the cross. Then they brought the second stone to it, by making it slide along this artificial road, and the same with the third. Then they knocked down the mound that had served them for a scaffolding, and no one could understand afterwards how these three rocks, towering above the earth, had been raised, fixed, and held upright, like a cross, standing alone. The dwellers in the valleys, my grandfather

used to say, despise us whilst we live, but our dead will always have more shade than they. That is how it was done, sir, and since that time, two generations of the family have been laid to sleep beneath the tree of stone which they planted.

I. But you, Claude, if you continue to live here alone, who will bury you in your turn? There will be no hands left after you to dig your last bed.

He. There are good hearts in the villages where I work, look you! and when I have worked for a family, I say to them: I hold you acquitted towards me while I live; but when I am dead, I reckon that you owe me your prayers. I have built a house for you for your life, you may well dig my house against my eternity, may you not? And we laugh, and they promise me, sir. I am not afraid: I shall be laid in the place which I have so often marked with my eyes.

I. And where is your place, Claude?

He (*showing me the nearest grave, where the grass was pressed down by the marks of two knees*). There, sir.

I. And why there more than elsewhere, my poor Claude? Will not God be able to find us everywhere?

He. Truly, sir; but I wish that he should find me so near another that he cannot separate us.

I. You have a deep thought, then, buried before you under that turf?

He. Yes, sir, a thought and my heart too.

I. This, doubtless, colours all your other thoughts, and every root of your heart. If I did not fear to make it bleed by touching it, I would ask you to explain this mystery to me by telling me something of the history of your life.

He. What would you have me tell you, sir? We have no history, "we poor people"; we have only our trade and our bread to earn. One blow of the hammer sounds like another, and one piece of bread tastes like another. What is there in this to interest you?

I. It is true that your bread is always kneaded with the same dough; you have no adventures; but you have hearts and souls. It is of the history of your heart and soul that I wish to know something, do you understand, in order to be able to comprehend how time has made you so tender and

compassionate to the afflicted, and in order to glorify God in the simplicity of a humble soul, as I should in the sublimity of a great genius.

He. Very well, sir ; since it is in order to praise God, I can refuse you nothing that you ask in his name ; I will tell you all ; it will not take longer than the time in which we see the sun pass over the valley, and travel from the steeple of Saint Point to the pines you have planted in the high part of your wood.

CHAPTER VI.

I.

CLAUDE appeared for a moment to search his memory, with his eyes raised towards the sky above the black cross, and he then related his history to me almost literally as follows :—

II.

Our hut was the one above that which I now inhabit, which formerly was the cow-shed of it. You will say to me, “Why have you not built up the house again ? and why do you sleep in the out-house, which is as damp and dark as a cave ?” I will confess it to you, sir ; it is that, in order to build up the room on the rock, to raise the walls again, to repair the floor and the roof, I should be obliged to cut down and tear up the ivy, which has become mixed, since the misfortune of our family, with the stones, rafters, and beams, and which has fixed itself where it has found nourishment. This beautiful ivy appeared to me, when I saw it so on my return, like a mantle, that the kindness of the mountain had thrown over the ruin of our happiness. I said, “I will not touch it ; there is room enough for us both now on this rock. Keep the upper part, I will take the lower, and the blackbirds will build and whistle in peace among your berries.” That is the reason, sir ; I have told it to you simply as I thought it. A poor lonely man, look you, attaches himself to everything, and loves everything that loves him.

III

My father was called Benoit la Hutte ; I never knew my mother's surname, — she was called *the mother*. They were cousins, brother and sister, brother-in-law and sister-in-law, uncle and aunt, nephew and niece, to all the inhabitants of the two other huts, the ruins of which you have seen in-heaps, with their little orchards surrounded by broom and untilled land, as you came up this way. The hollow of the gorge, the mountain slope, the heath, the broom, and the enclosure where we are sitting, always remained undivided and in common among the three houses of near relations. Each took one field or other, and cultivated it to grow rye or potatoes for the year. The animals fed where they liked, all together. When the season came for thrashing the chestnuts, the men and boys climbed the trees, the women and girls stood underneath to pick them up. They made three sacks of the produce more or less full, according to the number of children in each house, and each took his own. That was how we lived, sir. One of the three cousins, fathers of families, was an egg-merchant, who went to buy and sell eggs, chestnuts, and plums through the villages and in the fairs. Another was a knife-grinder ; he set out after harvest with his grindstone made of sandstone, mounted on four strong legs made of fir wood, with its iron handle over his back. He went to sharpen bills, scythes, and knives before people's houses during autumn and winter. His customers gave him his soup and a place in their hay-sheds, and he came back with some sous in his purse at the melting of the snow. As to my father, in order to help our mother to live and to clothe us, he went, like me, to hew out or cut stone in the quarries of the villages of Saint Point. He came back every evening to sup with the mother and us children, for he loved his wife and his house so much that he used to say, "I could never be an egg-merchant like Baptiste, or a knife-grinder like François ; for when I cannot see the smoke rising from the roof of the cottage when my wife puts the faggot on the fire from the quarry where I am at work, time seems very long to me, and the world too large." Ah ! he was an excellent man, and so gentle, so very gentle, that in the

evening, when he seated all of us little ones on his leather apron, my brother, my sister, and me, we loved that apron almost as much as our mother's.

IV.

A misfortune happened in the house entirely through my father's too great indulgence. One day my brother, who was a year older than I, had gone down to the quarry. It was autumn, and was cold. The poor child had lighted a fire of dry fern, to warm his little hands at the flame. My father said to him, "Take care, Gratien, not to touch a black powder that is there in a paper near my tools, it flies into the eyes when it is put near the fire." But the poor child, who had never been scalded, wished to see how this black dust flew into the eyes. He went and took a handful of it while my father, occupied with his work, was paying no attention to his little boy. He threw it on the fire; the powder darted out a great flame, and blinded him. From that time Gratien never had his sight again. His eyes continued as clear and beautiful as ever. The powder had only burnt out the sight. You would never have thought he was blind, but he could see nothing except the light of the sun out of doors, and of the fire in the house. It was a great misfortune in Les Huttes. Everybody came to weep with my mother. The child was seven years old. He could no longer walk alone. He was always hanging by my mother's apron, with his hand in the father's or mine. Our poor father was so unhappy at having been the cause of the misfortune, that he died the winter after of a broken heart, as they call it in the country.

V.

It was very difficult for my mother to bring us up, though she was still young, and very industrious, and did as much work with the pickaxe, bill, and rake, as a man. But my blind brother and I, a little sister at the breast, and a woman of thirty, though temperate and abstemious, made many mouths to one loaf. It was a grief to me to see the poor woman cut faggots, carry them on her back to the house, weed the rye, mow the meadow, bind the sheaves, thrash

them with the flail in front of the court, knead the bread, light the fire, cook the soup, lead Gratien by the hand, and nurse the baby. Added to all; at this moment, to complete the misery, the fever came into Les Huttes, and carried off the knife-grinder, his wife, and children. There only remained in his house one of his daughters, about the same age with myself, who was called Denise. The egg-merchant, frightened by the sickness that had ravaged Les Huttes, pulled down his house to carry away the planks and tiles, and went away and built a room with a shop near the church, on the road-side in the village, where trade was better. A child of eleven or twelve could not be left all alone near the hearth of her dead parents. My mother went to seek her, and brought her to us to live with us. The knife-grinder's empty house became the dwelling of swallows and lizards. It crumbled away one winter after another, as you have seen. Denise only went there sometimes on Sundays in summer, to sit down under the quince-tree, or pick the red berries of the holly, which she called her mother's necklace, and to cry on the step of the door, where no one either went in or out. Gratien always followed her; for my mother had said to Denise, "I give you the charge of the little blind boy whilst I am in the fields. You will take care he does not fall down the precipice." And these two children never left each other.

VI.

It gave me shame and trouble to see so much work, such poverty, and so many mouths to feed in our home. I already felt enterprising and strong. I said to my mother: "The crop of rye is poor, the chestnut-trees show no fruit this year; give me my father's tools." She gave them to me, shedding tears as she looked at them once more. I went down into the villages below, and said, "Who wants me to hew some stone for him? I will work without wages if I only have my bread." Some of them said to me, "Go into the quarry, we will see if you are worth your bread." I began to work for one or the other. In order to lengthen my time, I slept under some planks that they had lent me to make scaffoldings with against the rock, or else in the ox-stall, in the manger. I only went up to Les Huttes on

Saturday evenings, and I took up the few farthings I had earned and the little bread I had saved to my mother. My mother kissed me, and said, what a pity it is that you have not your father's hands, for you have his heart. I went into the fields with Denise and Gratien, whilst she rocked our little sister's cradle, or made small buck-wheat cakes for our Sunday's supper. Things went on in this way for three or four years. I became strong; the stones were as pliant in my hands as a truss of hay. I was not satisfied with only preparing them in the quarries for walls, I began to hew them with square edges, according to my fancy, for doors and windows, with the matting hammer, and I even ornamented them, sometimes, in bas-relief, with a rose or tulip, with their stalks, and their wide open leaves, a hen, a cock, a cat, or dog, according as the stone was intended, for a garden, a stable, a poultry-yard, the court, or the room of a house. Hunger is a good master, sir, especially the hunger of one's mother, or brothers and sisters. I have never had any other master, and yet go and look about in different places in the country, and ask, "Who hewed the stone round that barn door, or the dormer window of that pigeon-house?"—and they will still tell you, "Little Claude did it with his chisel and mallet." I also made stone benches for the old women and children to sit down on, by the side of the doors in the villages, and cut the name of the father of the family on them; and I made troughs of sandstone for the cattle to drink out of near the fountains, and I made a design of an ox's head on them, with his great eyes and horns, which seemed to be turning away from the trough after having drunk.

All this had procured me a little fame in the mountains, sir, and though I was only seventeen years old, I could easily have earned my living by nothing but masonry. But at sowing times, haymaking, or barley-thrashing, I went up and did all the hard work with my mother and Denise.

VII.

These were my fête days. I loved my mother and my poor blind brother so very much, and I loved Denise also so much! And who would not have loved her, sir? She was like the

third child of the house, like an obedient daughter to my mother. She gave all the service that a good servant and strong workwoman could have given in the house for wages. But it was of much use to talk of wages to her! When my mother spoke of them sometimes, "Is not your love good wages?" the young orphan would reply: "who was it who gave me a home, a mother, and two brothers in the mountain? Is it not wages to have a place by your fire, and a porringer, at your table? not to speak of the care you took of me before I was old enough to be serviceable in your house?" And if my mother insisted, she went away to cry behind the bush in the garden, with her apron over her head. Then my mother and Gratien would go to comfort her, and would say, "Well, then, do as your heart bids you, Denise! and since you will throw away your youth, and stay with poor people like us, very well! stay." And they said no more about it at that time.

VIII.

What made them think of it the more was, that during the last three or four years, she had become the most beautiful girl in all the mountain; and when my mother took her two or three times a year, on holidays, to see her cousins, the daughters of the egg-merchant in the village, all the girls and young men that saw her pass said to one another, "It is a pity, though, that she is growing up in the shade and never sees the sun, just like the blue eyes (the periwinkles they meant) under the bushes." But as to her, she did not even hear these compliments that they addressed to her in a low voice; she had no vanity like young girls belonging to rich houses; she did not even know whether she was pretty or ugly. She walked with her head bent, and her arms hanging down, with her eyes fixed on my mother's steps, and when any one spoke a word to her, she blushed, like a cherry, without knowing why, and a shiver went over her skin like still water when a light wind passes across it. Except with our mother and Gratien, whom she was not afraid of, she was as wild and timid as the young roebucks when they are sporting beside our wild flowers in the morning, and rush back into the wood at the sound of

the falling dew among the leaves. Even with me, sir, she was not as much at her ease as with them, because she did not see me every day as she saw them. However, we were very much like brother and sister, to one another, but still there was a little difference in her tone of voice when she spoke to me, and in the expression of her eye when she saw me; her voice trembled rather more, and her looks fell more on her naked feet. One might say that with the others she felt herself a child, but before me she felt that she was beautiful.

IX.

Oh, how very beautiful she was! and every month she became more and more so, though the well where she went to draw water was the only mirror in which she could ever see it. You should have seen her on Sunday mornings, when my mother, sitting on the door-step at sunrise, made her sit at her feet that she might comb her long hair, which was as smooth and shining as the rind of the chestnuts when they are taken fresh out of their thorny shells. She would throw her arms upon my mother's knees, and then lean her face down on her bare arms, with their short sleeves of coarse linen. Her face was hidden in her hair, that was spread out like the long soft threads of the maize on the ripe ear. It looked like a tangled skein, or the fleece of a brown lamb that has just been washed in the fountain; you could not tell where her mouth was, or where her forehead was. And then, if a gust of wind happened to blow on this fine veil, first her rosy mouth was seen, then her cheeks, looking rather pale, then her large blue eyes, dazzled by the sun, looking into the mother's face with such a clear gentle look, that if she had been her own daughter she could not have looked differently. This made us laugh, my mother and me, and, within ourselves, we pitied poor Gratien, because he could not laugh at what amused us, and see what we saw at these moments. He would say to me:—what does she look like? and what are the mother and Denise doing, that makes you laugh? and I would say to him, she is sitting down, she is leaning quite down; her head is on her apron, her face is hid in her hands, her eyes are blinded by her hair, the wind is blowing it about like a handful of dead

leaves. The holly has dropped one of its red berries upon her mouth. And that amused him, the poor child ! and when Denise was dressed, and had put on her black woollen frock, we all three went to walk in the barley-field, to pick poppies, or to sit under the chestnut trees, with our legs hanging over the edge of the ravine where the water murmurs ; for it pleased the blind boy at least to hear the water, and to hear the chestnuts that had been forgotten on the trees, fall as the warm wind of the spring shook the branches, or the blackbirds fly up so near us as almost to fan his cheeks with the motion of their wings.

X.

But I thought her almost as charming on days when she was at work, and had on neither her Sunday dress, nor her summer shoes, nor her winter sabots ; when her hair was not smoothed down, and fastened behind her neck with her red velvet riband ; but when she wore her loose frock of black sheep's wool, woven with the shuttle by herself in winter, fastened at the waist by a horn-buckle, and falling in great folds to her ankles ; her chemise of hempen lincn, with short sleeves turned up to the shoulders, full over her chest, and fastened under her chin by two strings tied in a knot on her breast ; her hair hanging down, sometimes on one shoulder, sometimes on the other ; her naked feet, often red with the cold, often powdered with sand, and always washed with the dew of the grass ; her cast-down eyes throwing the shadow of the long lashes on her skin ; her serious face ; but yet her lips always ready to open, to let her beautiful teeth shine out, small, white, and regular, as they were, like the first teeth of the kids. Sometimes the handle of a pickaxe would be seen over her shoulder, sometimes a stone jar on her head, bringing in the goats' milk ; sometimes both her arms stretched up, and raised over her head to support a great bundle of grass and wild flowers, larger than herself, that she had just weeded out from among the corn or the vines ; the flowers, yellow, red, or blue, and the long blades of grass escaping from the bands, and falling over her forehead so as to hide it down to her eyes ; sometimes kneeling on one knee, milking the ewes with one hand, while, with the other,

she made them lick salt to amuse them ; in short, whatever she did, one could not take one's eyes off her. But the time when I most admired her, sir, was when we went among the broom in the mountains to cut faggots for winter, and my mother put one on her back as long as the trunk of a cherry-tree, with all its leaves and flowers on it, to let it sweep the ground and comb them off as it was carried down to the house. You would have said, when you saw that young girl's face bent under the weight of those long stems, which swept the earth ten feet behind her, rustling and sowing its seeds and flowers in her path as she went on, that a fairy had suddenly risen from the earth to carry away the covering of the field where she had slept the night before. Or you might have believed you saw one of those beautiful peacocks that you have in your garden with a woman's face, trailing and unrolling in the sun a long green tail, with its blue and yellow eyes, which he had sown in the grass behind him.

.XI.

But she was very pretty, too, in winter, when she lighted the faggots in the evening on the hearth, kneeling before the great brass dogs for the fire, when the flame of the broom, suddenly colouring her pale face, her cheeks became quite rosy and transparent, and you saw the flame through them, and felt the light in your eyes as you would at a fire of charcoal.

And what pleased most in her, sir, was not so much the lovely grace in her face and figure, as her gentleness, her obedience, her kindness towards everybody, and her timidity, which made her the voluntary slave of all those who had a service to ask of her in the house or the fields. We all loved her, but the animals loved her at least as much as we did.

You should have seen when she opened the door in the morning to go to the spring, how the fowls and pigeons, even the sparrows and swallows, would rejoice, ruffle their feathers, hurry towards her, some from the roof, others from the branches of the trees, others from the perch, or the pigeon-house, to fly around her, as if they only knew it was morning when they saw her. Above all, you should have seen the sheep and goats, lambs and kids, come out of the shed when she raised the latch, thrust their heads and horns into her

apron, raise themselves upright with their feet on her arms or shoulders, dispute with one another a stroke from her hand, a word from her mouth, a tress of her hair to smell or bite at, before even thinking of spreading themselves over the heath. When they were far off, very far, alone on the heights with the dog, we called them in vain, they would not come ; but if they heard her voice, you would see them all leave the branches of bramble, or the wild thyme, or clover, and come bounding down from the top of the mountain like snowballs rolling to her very feet.

XII.

He, however, who loved her best at that time, and whom she appeared to love the most because of his misfortune, was my brother Gratien. Ever since my mother received Denise into the house, the poor boy had never left her side, as if the good God had given him light in her. Denise, on her part, through the tenderness of heart that she possessed, had devoted herself to him, because he so constantly required her services and her company. Though a child herself, she was like those mothers of many children whose eyes and heart seem to be given entirely to that one who is the weakest and most infirm among them all. This is one of the proofs of the goodness of God, who often bestows something very good as a counterpoise where he has inflicted a weight of suffering. My mother had said to Denise when she took her into the house, "You will take care of your blind cousin, you will prevent his feeling weary in the house, you will take him into the fields, you will teach him the names of the animals, you will lead him back into his path when he is going to run against the wall, you will turn him towards his own furrow when he wants to help us to dig up the enclosure with his pickaxe or to sow it, you will go and get a handful of hemp for him in the barn when he has finished weaving his own." Denise had done all she told her at first, when she was a little child, from a feeling of obedience, and afterwards, when she grew older, from the impulse of her good heart. They looked, he and she, like twins who had never quitted each other since they were born.

XIII.

"Gratien could no more do without her than she without him. When she went out, in the morning, half-dressed, to milk the sheep and goats, he went out after her and sat down opposite to the rising sun on the stone bench that I had made for my amusement on Sundays, in the grey rock beside the door. He said to her, "Denise, what is to be seen in the sky and in the valley? Is there a mist over the meadows of Bourg-Vilain? Are the windows on the great balcony at the château of Saint Point shut? Or, do you see the gentleman walking up and down the broad walks with a book in his hand, as he used formerly when I could see? Are there sleek, white cows in the orchards on the slope behind the gardens? Are the clouds round the sun rosy or grey? Are there many wreaths of blue smoke rising from the roofs of the houses and dispersing over the grass fields like flights of pigeons beat down by the wind? Are the mallows and white mulleins in flower? Are the cherries set on the black cherry-trees? Have the white blossoms of the thorns made the ground look white like snow under the bushes? Have the walnut-trees got their smooth husks like the backs of green caterpillars? Has the lilac opened its buds hanging on its branches like bunches of grapes made of flowers? Have the lambs got their teeth, and do they begin to leave their mothers and to browse on the tender moss? Tell me if the last kid has black spots by its eyes as his mother had in my time, and if he has begun to peel the bark off the young willows with his horns that are beginning to grow?"

XIV.

And Denise was never tired of answering yes or no, if or but, to all this, and always with goodwill in her voice and in the tone of her words, and of adding all manner of details about the forms of objects, the light in the sky, the colours on the mountain, and the character of the animals, that she thought might interest the child. And then she pretended always to want him to help with everything, and to employ him continually on this and that in her work. Sometimes

she made him hold the goats by the horns while she milked them ; sometimes the sheep lying on the ground while she sheared them ; sometimes the baskets under the chestnut-trees while she picked up the chestnuts, knocked down either by the long pole or the wind ; sometimes her pickaxe, hoe, or rake, whilst she climbed up the fields before him, spinning with her distaff and guiding him with her voice or her hand, that he might not miss the plank that served for a bridge or the ford of the stream. She then gave him the end of her apron to hold, as a real mother does to her little children before they walk alone. When the earth was dug before sowing the crop, she gave him a pickaxe, and placed him at the end of the field beside her, that he might believe he also did his little work with the rest, and when he went too much to right or left in his track ; she took him gently by the shoulder and put him into line with us. And if this part of the field was badly turned up, if he unavoidably left clods of earth or stones on it, she did not say a word to him for fear of distressing him, but next day she herself went over my brother's work again. Quite the reverse of telling him that his work was of no use, she encouraged him as if he had been a good workman ; she said to him, "there is no difference between your work and mine, Gratien." And she uttered no falsehood, sir, for it was she who worked for both.

XV.

She always took care, whether in the fields or in the house, to keep near him, that she might help him in everything—cut his bread, hold his cup to him, fill his glass, keep a place for him on the bench. When she was alone with him, one might have said that she thought aloud to give him a share in her life. There was not a lizard in its hole, a swallow on its nest, a vine-leaf on the wall, a spark in the fire that she did not tell him of, in order that the time might not seem long to the poor afflicted one, and that he might believe he really saw inwardly with his own eyes what she enabled him to see without them by her voice. He really did not know that he was blind when she was there, and she was there all day long ; his sight was not lost, sir, it was transposed from him into her. She was eyes to him and senses to

him ; eyes and senses that saw and lived in another being, and were as valuable to him—perhaps even more valuable—than if they had been in himself. I verily believe that if any one had said to him, “which would you rather, Gratien, that your eyes should be restored to you, or Denise taken away from you ?” he would have answered, “keep my eyes away from me, I like better to see through her than myself. I see as well, and I have her voice and company besides.”

XVI.

Also you should have seen how the voice of Denise made him come and go, turn, rise, stoop, sit down, walk, follow, or stop, as if by an inward spring which had been put in motion by the same hand in each. And in truth, sir, the habit of speaking lovingly, gently, with compassion, to this afflicted one, had given to the voice of Denise, ever since her childhood, a tone of love and tenderness, a sweet tremulousness that spoke to the heart as I have never heard another voice of any girl or woman do during my life. It was like the tinkling of the bell of Saint Point, at once gay and sad, when it has finished pealing at the baptism of some child, and the sound dies away as it rises from the valley and makes the leaves of the ash-trees tremble slightly even here. But the church bell has not a heart at the bottom of its music, and every word that came from Denise had in it the audible beating of her heart, which lived, felt, and sung in her voice. I believe that the guardian angels they tell of in the village have a voice nearly like it when they speak to little children asleep in their cradles, or to poor dying men in their last dreams at the gates of paradise.

XVII.

Once it happened that Gratien, after she had described to him everything around them both, and he had appeared to sit reflecting on all that she had described, said to Denise, “But tell me now, Denise, what you are like yourself. I saw you when I had my eyes, and when you used to come holding by your mother’s apron to bring soup to your father as he was sharpening the axes, scythes, and bills before the

houses. But I do not know what you have grown like since then ; and, except by your voice and your soft hand, I know nothing of your face now : I should like, however, to be able to imagine it to myself. It troubles my mind not to be able to see you as well as to hear you ; for, as to everything else, it is the same to me as if I did see ; I see well enough through your eyes."

And then, sir, to joke and to provoke him for a moment, Denise said to him in fun, "I have hair as red as the squirrel's that we found in its nest in the young fir-tree when I was little. My eyes are not larger than the small flowers that peep out under the bushes ; they are grey, and as dull as the water in the ravine when it is in the shade, and the dead leaves begin to fall into it. The skin of my face is all marked with red stains, and very much sun-burnt. I have this and that"—and so on, until she had dressed up a very ugly image of herself for the poor boy, and put her hands on her lips that he might not hear her laugh. But he said to her, "You are a little cheat ; your voice and the skin of your hands do not belong to such a face as that. You want to deceive me or to amuse yourself, Denise ; that is not right of you ; you know that we ought not to trifle with the blind, because they cannot see whether we speak the truth or no." Then turning to me when he heard her laugh, "Tell me, Claude, what is she like ?" And then I said, "Her hair is like the dead leaves in October, when the wind, coming after the frosts, makes them the colour of a bay-horse ; she has eyes as brilliant as the panes of glass in the chateau when the morning sun shines through them to enter rooms full of things that reflect it back, so that one cannot look at them without being blinded ; she has a fine skin, that changes colour, and is rosy like the apples that our uncle the egg-merchant used to sell in the villages in summer, and that we used to pick up at the door to play with when he threw us one out of his panniers. She is as tall as the door of the house, and is obliged to stoop her head a little when she goes out or comes in. Her feet and hands are as white and polished as the pebbles in our spring ; she walks barefoot as proudly and gracefully as a lady moving along a church, that every one is looking at as she passes in her beautiful shoes. Her neck is long, round, and flexible, like the pigeons when they are

cleaning their wings with their beaks on the roof. She has lips like the red leaves of a pink, and teeth like apple-pips before they are ripe. Her look is gentle like her mother's, and faithful as our dog when he looks at us."

Then she blushed with shyness or with pleasure, sir, without knowing why ; for as to vanity, she had no more of it than a bird that trims his feathers in the sun to make them shine ; and she hid her face in her hands to laugh. And Gratien said to her, " Why did you want to deceive me, naughty girl ? However, that is not what I am most troubled about ; I should like you so much to be very ugly, because then the young men of Saint Point would not look at you when you go there for a holiday, and you would not leave Les Huttes to marry some day down there." And he became serious, and we all three talked of something else.

CHAPTER VII.

I.

It was thus we all three approached the age when the children of the egg-merchant, the knife-grinder, and ourselves would reach our majority, and a division would be made of our common domain on the mountain, which, as I have said, had never till that time been divided. This made our poor mother very anxious. She said to us, as we thrashed the chestnuts, " Who knows if this will be ours two years hence. It was, nevertheless, my great-grandfather that planted it, and it gives more than a mule's load of chestnuts every two years." When we were sowing the inclosure with maize or apples, she said, " Who knows if we shall gather in the crop ? This soil has, nevertheless, drunk in the sweat of your poor father's brow and mine since the year of our marriage ; and if each was to take back what belongs to him in the land which he has cultivated for forty summers and forty autumns, many of these clods of earth would come back to those who have turned and turned them again like their own bed." As she sat on Sunday near the spring that you see there among the water-crosses under the arched stone, she said to

us, "Who knows if in the season that is coming it will flow by our meadow, or by a meadow belonging to others? Nevertheless, it was your father who found it one day as he was digging a hole in the earth to plant an ash-tree, and who made this basin to collect and to hold it so that the cattle might go and drink there when they came in from feeding among the broom, and who made those little trenches in which it runs, as if in a flat spoon, to spread over all the slope of the orchard, and lose itself down below in the hollow among the osiers and rushes."

And we saw that this idea tormented her more and more in proportion as the year of the division grew nearer, as the shadow of that rock advances without our being able to see it move towards our feet.

II.

Gratien appeared to think of it even more than she did; but it was not because of the chestnut-trees, the field of barley, or the spring; he only knew all that by name. A ray of sun on his body, and the step of Denise near him, this was all his domain, poor fellow!—what was all the rest of the world to him? He loved my mother and me also; there was nothing more for him. What a pity that misfortune happened to him at eight years of age! He would have been a strong workman, a good labourer now; or else he would have followed a trade like me; he would have heated and hammered iron on the anvil to make nails, tiers for cart-wheels, teeth for harrows, and polished ploughshares for the ploughs in the villages down below. Or, still more likely, he would have become a weaver, for he had many girlish tastes in his character. He would have sent the shuttle backwards and forwards in the cellar below the house, and on Sunday he would have gone down with his yard-measure in his hand, and his roll of grey cloth on his shoulder to carry back to the housewives the weight of the thread which they had spun. To look at him, sir, you would never have thought that the fire had destroyed anything in his eyes. They were blue, like those of Denise, only you could not read his deep thoughts there; you could only see them at the corners of his mouth, which varied in expression with his feelings, and were a little sad, though habitually smiling. His features were small, his

skin was fair, his hands small and delicate ; he was tall and thin, and he stooped forward a little, like a child who has tied a bandage over his eyes in play, and who holds out his hands before him to grope along and feel his way. Except for that, sir, he was more pleasing and handsome than many of the young men of the mountain ; and then he had so sweet and tremulous a voice, that you would have said he was always praying or returning thanks. He was not at all exacting, sir ; he sat on the stone of the well, on the bench by the door, on the roof of the chestnut-tree there, wherever he was told to wait, and he waited without ever being impatient. Many women might have loved him, believe me, for they love those who cannot do without them.

III.

As to me, sir, I had neither the same hair, nor the same eyes, nor the same character. It seemed as if my mother's thoughts had wandered in two different woods while she bore us ; with him she dreamed of willow-trees, with me of pines. He was pliant like the one, I upright and sombre like the other. I had hair as black as my eyes, a long face, pale complexion, my cheeks covered with a downy beard, lips oftener closed than open, arms well set for work, and an expression that was often thoughtful, as if I had lost something that the stars were keeping for me, as Denise used to say when she rallied me gently. In short, sir, I was pensive though I was young. I did not like company as much as my brother. I was never happy except when I was alone in my quarry, or with my mother, my brother, or my little sister, or Denise. When I saw any one else pass near my workplace, I used to begin to whistle, that they might not speak to me ; and when any of the mountain girls took a path towards me to meet me, I took another. I was as wild as Denise. They used to call us in the villages the roebuck and the roe. The name clung to us for a long time ; nevertheless, we never said a word to each other either in confidence or openly. I always left her with my brother out of pity for his misfortune. When I went into the fields, or woods, or broom, or to wash the sheep with them, it was always to him that she talked, never to me. She would have been grieved if

he had felt jealous of one of her attentions or her words another person. She looked very happy and blushed whenever I came home on Saturdays, and said to her, "Good day Denise." But except for that, she went in and out in the house and court with my brother. She had not a word or tone for me more than for any one else ; on the contrary, her voice trembled a little when she answered me, as if she did not feel as much love and familiarity for me as for the rest of the family. She avoided being alone with me, as if naturally. Notwithstanding all this, it was easy to see that this embarrassment in a beautiful young girl did not proceed from ill-humour. Gratien said that she was in much better spirits and more obliging on Sundays than other days, and that he knew by her voice when it was the day for me to come up.

IV.

This was the way we passed the time, sir. Since midsummer I had made a discovery, as they say, between the highest villages and Les Huttes, below the path to the heath. It was an ancient quarry of fine sandstone, fit for grindstones, that had been abandoned, as soft as butter, as free as gold, sounding like a bell under the pick. When I was not in full work at building in the villages I came back to my quarry ; I dug there deeper and deeper to find better veins of stone. I rolled the rubbish into the ravine below, so that after a couple of years I had cleared the ancient quarry of all the fragments which they say had been heaped up there since the time of a people called the Romans. I also mined below them with the lever and with powder, and came to what you would have called a work of the giants. There were seats like stairs for legs of two toises long, vaulted places, grottoes, where I penetrated as miners do into their search of coal, seeking for still finer-grained stone, and walls made of rock, heaped up and left to go to ruin, as high as the ramparts of a city. The end of the quarry where I rolled my stones and hewed them was so deep when seen from the top where the heath grew and hung over the edge, that if the shepherds threw a stone into it, a moment passed before the sound was heard. My brother, my little sister, my mother, and Denise came sometimes to me there when I

was at work. They always lifted up their hands in astonishment at seeing what ravage one solitary man with his patience and his lever had made in the ribs of the mountain. Sometimes also, when the path was too slippery for my brother's steps, Denise came alone to bring my bread and milk in a basket for my day's food. But then she did not stop, sir. She put the basket down on a large stone at the foot of the rope-ladder, where I was always suspended, as it were, against the sides of my rock ; she called me from below with a voice that shook with fear, then she ran away with her hand before her eyes, as if she was frightened to see me come down from such a height.

V.

It was there I best liked to be, sir, because nobody, except Denise, came to disturb me at my work by looking at me and asking me questions, as they did in the villages. My father's trade pleased me more than a richer and more skilful one would have done. I said to myself, you are doing what your father did, and perhaps in time you will do it as well as he himself. He would be pleased if he came back to see you at his work. Besides, this trade does not exact so much time as others. You may leave it, and take it up again when you like. It does not prevent you from going up to the hut to see your mother, Denise, and the animals, on Saturday ; nor from making the hay, nor weeding the corn, nor turning up the ground on the mountain with the pickaxe, nor thrashing the trees with them ; and then, though you do not charge much for your grindstones to the grinders, smiths, and mowers of the country, still you honestly earn your own bread, and the bread of your brother and little sister, who cannot work for the family. These thoughts gave me courage ; there were no beds of stone hard enough to resist me any longer.

VI.

Besides, I must tell you everything, I loved the trade, I loved the hollow of the quarries, the heart of the mountain, the secret recesses of the earth, as the sailors I knew at Marseilles love the hollow of the waves, the bottom of the sea, the foam on the rocks ; as shepherds love the tops of the

mountains ; as woodcutters love to plunge their hatchet dripping with sap in the cloven trunk of old oaks and chestnut-trees. God has given to every one his taste, that every state may be filled with content. That which has always kept me in mine is, that it can be worked at alone. You can, without disturbing yourself, whistle, sing, think, dream, pray to God. The work goes on always under your hand, whilst the heart and mind, on their side, go wherever they like. That is the pleasure of the trade of a stonemason.

VII.

Then it is a pleasant trade for the ear, sir. When I am on my knees before my stone, well-squared and supported on two deal rollers, which help me to move it at my will ; when, in a corner of the quarry, in the winter sun as well as the summer's shade, I take off my jacket and turn up my shirt-sleeves ; take the chisel in my left hand, and the mallet in my right ; begin to hollow my groove or round my moulding with light equal strokes, like water that falls drop by drop from the height of the spring into the basin, sounding as it falls, there issues from my stone, if it is free and good, a perpetual music, which soothes the heart and head as sweetly as the distant peal of the village bells. My mallet may be called the clapper and my stone the metal side of a bell. You cannot believe how the sound encourages the work. Soldiers are obliged to beat the drum to give themselves courage in the march ; sailors are obliged to sing to get strength to haul in their anchors and ropes. We, sir, we have no need of that ; our work sings for us with the regular strokes of the hammer. Ah ! it is a beautiful sound, let me tell you, the ring of a thin block of marble, granite, or sandstone, or a trough made of freestone, hollowed out to hold water, and polished with the matting hammer. You seem to hear beforehand the resounding steps of holy men walking onward, prolonged by the echoing arches of a church, or the surging of the running waters which will fill the trough for the cattle.

VIII.

Then, you will say it is vanity, and, truly, I do not say it

is not, for be it long or short, time is only time. When it has passed, it is as though it had never been ; but still, call it vanity if you will, still in an employment we always feel it a certain pleasure to say to ourselves, that which I make at this moment will still last after I am gone. Those who write books think that they will be studied by eyes which will not perhaps see the light before a thousand times a thousand years from this time, according to what people say. Carpenters who make presses and cabinets please themselves by thinking ;—if this is well waxed, well put together, thoroughly dry, it will last and preserve the impress of my hand from generation to generation in the houses where the newly-married pair settle themselves. Those who plant a chestnut tree or an oak say : the little pip or little kernel that I sow, contains here between my fingers more life and more time hidden within its thin covering, than the life and time hidden within all the men who are born, or are to be born in this vast country during five or six centuries. They will thrust forth their roots deep into the earth, they will pierce the rock to draw up their nourishment, they will spread their leaves and their shadow over the place that I choose for them, after the shadow of my own body, and the shadows of twenty or thirty generations of men proceeding from me, have been swept from the face of the earth as these leaves at their feet are swept by the November wind. But what is that in comparison with the duration that the stonemason gives to his idea, as he raises and lowers his mallet on his chisel ? He says to himself, this stroke of my matting-hammer will remain engraved on this granite till the mountain itself is melted in the fires of the earth's last day ; this moulding that I have hollowed or raised in relief with my chisel ; this form that I give according to my fancy to the stone, will not be worn out, nor effaced, nor unfolded, as long as the world lasts ; the impression of my will and my hand is eternity ! Those who are not born for a thousand years, when they see this cornice, this moulding, this panel, this socle, this column, this reservoir under the fountain, where the water bubbles eternally, will say to themselves, " Who made that ? " God himself, when he calls back his earth to himself, and turns it round in his hands at the end of time, to examine it, will say, as he looks at these rents that the

quarry has made in his mountains, and the marks of tools on these broken stones, "An insect has gnawed my earth, a man has touched, has modified my element." Think of that, sir! and is not that something to make the stonemason proud of his trade? for indeed it is a calling that has to do with things that last for ever. Rust wears away the blacksmith's iron; but granite or red porphyry, of which you see some small pieces among the pebbles in the stream there, nothing wears them away. They say, that in a country called Egypt, there are heaps of hewn stone as high as mountains, neither the use of which, nor why, nor by whom they were raised in platforms one above another is known, nor in what infinite distance of time it took place. People, kings, priests, mysteries, history, the bones of the dead, all have crumbled away, and been lost to the memory of men, all have flowed down with the waters of a river they call the Nile, all have disappeared with the sand they call the desert; very well! a soldier who came back from Egypt and described these pyramids to me, told me of quarries as large as the beds of seas, from which these hewn stones have been taken; told me that they still see some in the workshops, that are only half-divided by the saw of the Egyptians, or the giants of those times, and that he has even seen, on a brick enclosed within those stones, the impression of the foot and hand of one of the workmen who built and fashioned those monuments. Does that belong to time? and are there many kings or queens who have left a trace of themselves in the world as completely their own, and as durable, as that poor workman?

Very well, I say to myself sometimes, you will leave a trace also on your stone! That consoles a man for his fragile existence, does it not? It makes him also think how small a thing he is by the side of the block of stone that he shapes under his hammer, and that will last so many ages after his dust has returned to earth; but it makes him think, too, that the spirit of man, which is greater than all that, which comprehends all that, which looks beyond all that, is quite another kind of work of the good God! And that leads him to thank his Creator, to glorify and bless him in time and eternity, in littleness and grandeur. I thought of all these things while making my grind-

stones. Besides, solitude makes us inquiring. Man, when alone, seeks the company of God. When I was there buried in the recesses of the mountain, after mid-day, resting for a moment in the sun, with no company but my little dog asleep on my jacket, my heart rose on high, as if it had wings ; I looked at the blue sky above the pines, where the eagles soared, and said within myself to God, "Dost thou hear the prayer of man which rises to thee from the hollow of the hill ; thou, Lord, who dost hear the sound of the fly's wings, and regardest the life of the small gnats bathed in a ray of thy sun ?"

And then I thought of my home, my mother, my brother, Denise, everything in short. I was happy, and yet sometimes I was melancholy, and my mother used to say to me when I went in, "What ails you ?" I answered, "I do not know." And in truth I did not know then. There was a shadow on my heart that prevented it from flowering in its youth.

IX.

It seemed to me that Denise had some feeling of dislike towards me. When I entered the house, she went out to go to the well or the shed. When I spoke to her cordially, she only answered with a yes or no, as if she were impatient to get rid of my conversation. When I joked on Sunday with her and my brother, she did not laugh heartily, or rather she laughed with her lips, but did not laugh with her eyes. It was as though she had some hidden thought beneath them ; she would wander away to a little distance to gather nuts, or pick periwinkles in the ravine. On the contrary, when she was alone with my brother and sister, I heard them all joking and laughing as they used to do. One day that I asked her why she was so serious and silent with me, and if I had vexed her in any way without knowing it, she said no, that she loved me as much as the others, that these were only fancies that I conjured up, and then she turned her back on me, without bad humour, however. She left us, my brother and me, and went up into the hay-loft by the ladder, as if to get grass to throw to the young kids ; she remained there all the evening, and when she came down again, her eyes were a little red, and she secretly

gave her bread to the fowls under the table, instead of eating it pleasantly with us as she did on other days.

X.

I said to my mother next day : " Denise feels unkindly towards me, I must go from home to make my tour of France." My mother began to laugh, and said to me : " Claude, you are very simple for nineteen. The poor girl does not know herself what is the matter with her ; but, as to me, I saw it coming on long since ; she only seems to feel unkindly towards you, because she feels too kindly ; when girls of her age laugh with young men, it is a bad sign for marriage, look you ; but when they run away from them, it is a sign they wish to be sought, for good and all."—" Oh no," answered I, " Denise makes none of those pretences."—" Very well," said she, " do you on your part make a pretence to-morrow that you are going to make your tour of France, and you will see if she is pleased or sorry."—" Very well, I shall not make any pretence, I shall go in reality," I replied, and I went away quite sorrowful and sat on the margin of the well.

XI.

In the evening after supper, I said to my mother, brother, and little sister, before Denise : " I am going to bid you all good bye. I want to make myself a good companion workman. To-morrow, before day-break, I start for my tour of France." My brother and sister were very sorry. My mother gave me, in their presence, my father's staff, with its handle covered with leather and studded with brass-headed nails, his fine apron and tools. When Denise saw that I was putting oil on the leather of my shoes, she went into the room above the cow-shed and came back no more. Every one was sorrowful, except my mother, who doubted much if I should go so far.

XII.

Notwithstanding, I set out in the morning as I had said, and as I passed under Denise's shutter in the court, I called to her, " Good bye, Denise," but there was no answer.

said to myself, "I must have offended her very much, since she lets me go in this manner without even wishing me a good journey. My feet seemed glued to the earth under her window, as if the nails of my shoes had been sunk in the rock. At last I went down by the path, but slowly, though, without looking back, lest I should be tempted to return, my legs tottering under me like a man who has been drinking. I had not, however, drunk anything, except my tears, all night. I had a mist over my eyes; I groped along as I walked; the earth seemed to sink from under me; it was as dark as night. Notwithstanding, the last little stars which fly before the day into the depths of heaven, as girls when they are bathing take refuge in the water for fear of being seen, had sunk below the pine-trees of the mountain, and the sun which we could not yet see already saw us from behind Mont Blanc.

Yet how strange a being is man, sir; though I trembled, and though a cold perspiration covered my body, I began to whistle the tune of a dance, to put myself in heart, and as if I said to myself, you are stronger than your sorrow, and you can laugh at everything. Any one who had met me would have said: "There is a young man who is in excellent spirits and is going to a wedding;" but the good God would have seen something very different if he had opened my poor heart.

XIII.

But a sound that I heard some steps from my path, among the dead leaves, soon cut short my whistling. Behold, just at the place you have crossed this morning where all the paths of the mountain join together, like rivulets in a lake, to leave the region of Les Huttes, and cross the great ravine in which they terminate, there where there lies the large trunk of a decayed chestnut-tree stretching from one edge of the ravine to the other, so as to serve as a bridge, I saw something that raised itself from the foot of a tree, and appeared as if it would prevent my passing the bridge. Well, thought I to myself, here is some one who has risen early to bring out his goats in the dew, or else it is a beggar who has found all the barn doors shut, and has slept under the trees. But what did I feel, sir, when, on drawing near,

I say it was neither one nor other, but that it was Denise, who was keeping her kids here before it was light enough for the little creatures to distinguish a bramble from a wild vine, or a clover leaf from a hemlock. I was very happy to see her once more, hard of heart as I believed her to be towards me; yet, sir, you may think what you will of me, but I would have given I know not what rather than meet her in this way alone, and face to face. My limbs trembled so, that I could neither advance nor retreat. If there had been another way to right or left to cross the ravine, I should certainly have taken it that I might not touch her dress, nor hear her voice again; but there was no other. I was obliged to take courage and walk on towards the end of the bridge, as if I had neither heard nor seen anything.

XIV.

When I got quite near, and raised my eyes, which had been before cast down on the ground, I saw that Denise had placed herself right before me at the end of the bridge, and barred the way with her body. I stopped six paces from her, not knowing what this could mean, for she was not accustomed to lead her animals so far off, nor at so early an hour. My heart swelled and murmured at her within me like the stream under the rock when the snow melts.

But I had no sooner raised my eyes as I felt her breath on my face, and saw the shadow of her body cast on my feet by the rising sun, than the current of my feelings was instantly changed, and my anger softened into compassion.

XV.

I could scarcely recognize her that morning for the same I had seen the evening before, so much was she changed by this night passed in the cold air of the mountain. Her feet were wet and trembling in the grass which cracked under them covered with hoar frost. Her black woollen dress was rumpled and glued to her figure by the dew. Her hair was flattened on one side, as if she had lain with her head on her arm, and it had escaped out of her black lace cap on the other, and was all strewn with dead leaves and

pieces of yellow moss, like the fleece of a lamb which has torn its way through briars. She had black and blue rings round her eyes; one might have fancied she had been struck by her kids' horns. Her eye-lids were cast down; a tear-drop hung to each. Oh, God! said I to myself, is that Denise? My heart was rent. I tried to open my lips to say good-day and good-bye to her, at least without anger, but I could not; I gasped for breath. I stood, without power to move, like a phantom which had issued from the wood.

XVI.

But Denise raised her hands to her neck to take off her black velvet riband necklace that she generally wore on Sundays, and to which hung on her stomacher a little crucifix of gilt-brass which had been her mother's. She took the crucifix between both her hands, and holding it towards me, still without raising her head: "Since you are going away from Les Huttes, Claude," said she to me in a voice which trembled on her pale lips, "do me the kindness to take with you, for love of me, this little present which I make to you, and to think of me sometimes when you find it in the bottom of your bag as you pack or unpack it. You do not love me as the rest of the family do. I have known it for a long time; but it is no matter. Claude, I bear you no ill-will for all that, be sure of it, and I should wish to bring good fortune to you, if I could, with this the most precious thing that I have. I have besides, some farthings in my father's leather purse, with his silver cup for tasting the wine in the wine presses. Here," said she, letting the purse and the necklace with the crucifix drop from her hands into the pocket of my jacket, "I pray of you, Claude, take that also for the love of God."

I was so astonished to hear her address me in so distant a manner for the first time in our lives, and at the same time so surprised that she showed so much affection for me at the last moment, after having behaved so coldly to me for three months, that I neither knew what I did nor what I felt. I put my hand in my pocket to refuse the purse, and give everything back to her. My fingers touched hers. This made my whole frame turn cold, and my face turn hot,

so that I could no longer see ; I shook with a sudden tremor, and while trying to separate her fingers from mine, and to force her to take back the present which she tried to force me to keep, the crucifix, necklace, and leather purse, fell into the high grass between us.

XVII.

By a similar movement and without reflection, we both went down on our knees one opposite to the other, to seek and pick them up, and our two faces met without our intending it. A tear from her eyes, warm as a drop of summer rain, fell on the back of my hand in the grass. I felt, well, that it was not the dew. "Can it be," said I within myself, "that such a warm tear can fall for one who is seen to go away from the house with pleasure?" This made me lift my eyes to hers as we rose again. She still held the purse and crucifix in her fingers to offer them to me, and she also raised her eyes towards me to beg me, with all her heart, to take them back. You would have declared those eyes were two large blue flowers of the periwinkle by the fountain, on which, as she raised her brimming pitcher, she had let some water run down. She looked at me with so much humility through this rain of her eyes ; there was so much prayer in her upward look, raised towards heaven or towards me, that I began to shed tears too without knowing why, and we remained there for a time opposite to each other, our hands joined around the purse and crucifix, no more able to speak than if we had been two tree trunks.

XVIII.

At last I took courage, and said, "Dénise, you do not feel unkindly towards me then, since you give me all you have, and since you weep because I am going to make my tour of France?" "Oh ! that is quite sure," said she, earnestly, "but I thought it was you, Claude, who felt unkindly towards me, because you did not speak to me pleasantly, as you used to do, and seemed to think me in the way in the family." If I avoided you, it was because I thought my presence was disagreeable to you." "And I, I was going

away because I thought you had a dislike to me ; but I see, now, that it was a fancy, because my first step to leave the country has made you get up so early, and brought so many tears into your eyes. Let us say no more about it, Denise," said I, fastening the necklace round her throat with my trembling hands ; "I will go home again, and hang up my bag on the nail by the chimney."

She jumped in the air with both feet, clapping her hands, and smiling brightly, though tears still ran from her eyes. How happy we were that we had had this explanation ! We began to return to the hut, talking of all sorts of things. My mother, who had guessed how it would all be, came out from behind the bushes where she had hid herself with the little girl. "Your tour of France is finished then, Claude, my poor child," said she to me. "So much the better. Nonsense ! what could you find better if you went to the other end of the country ? Since you love one another, would it not have been better to say so at once ? We would have had the betrothal before hay-harvest." At these words Denise and I became quite red. "We loved one another, then !" We said this without words to each other on our astonished faces. "Oh, yes ! my children," said our mother, as if she had heard what we had not said, "you have loved each other since the apple-tree was in blossom ; I knew it when I saw how you went away from one another, she to go and sit by the well, you to walk among the sage all alone, like two young creatures that have lost their way. When the heart is light, we do not carry it away into solitude so. I knew that you would end by meeting at last, without seeking one another, and that all paths lead to the high road. But I would say nothing, lest I should shake the fruit down before the right season, or say the word before the heart was ready. Now you must be betrothed, and I am very glad of it, for it will put an end to all these affairs among our relations, and the division among the three huts which the egg-merchant's children want. Two of the properties will now make only one, as the two families are to be united, and you two will have but one house. Is it not so, Claude ? Is it not so, Denise ?"

We said not a word, and did not dare even to raise our eyes to each other ; but we continued to walk one behind

the other towards the hut. Our mother had said truly ; we loved each other without knowing it.

CHAPTER VIII.

I.

"Now," added my mother, "you may speak to each other." To speak, means, in our language, loyally to pay court to each other before the betrothal.

I hung up my bag on the nail. I took up my tools and went joyously down the mountain to do my day's work at the quarry : but I spoiled many stones that day. The hammer went as the head dreamed. I saw the face of Denise like a rainbow in the dust that flew from my chisel. I continually looked to see if the sun was not going down, so that I might have the right to leave off work and go up to see her again at Les Huttes. It seemed to me that it must have been nailed in the middle of the sky, and that it would never go down towards the chateau.

II.

When I came back to the hut in the evening, my mother had told my brother Gratien and my little sister Annette that she meant to have Denise and me betrothed in five weeks, that we might unite the two ends of the field where the broom grew, of the enclosure within the stones, and the large chestnut-trees, of which half the fruits belonged to the egg-merchant and half to us, according as the bough hung on his side of the land or ours, which occasioned words between the two branches of the family. "And then, my poor child," our mother had added, "it is also for you, do you see, that I desire this betrothal ; for when Denise is once married into the family, she will run no further risk of being asked, as she already has been, by the young men of the valley, and of leaving Les Huttes. If I were dead and Denise gone for ever, what would become of you ? Who would hold you by the hand in the paths ?" This news had

greatly rejoiced my brother and my little sister. My brother said, "What a happiness that Denise will not leave the family. I am sure then always to have my arm in my eyes." We talked of the betrothal joyously all the evening while eating our soup. All was contentment in Les Huttes. Denise put her heart in everything she did, she went, she came, she had never been so attentive in cutting my poor brother's bread and in amusing Annette. She called to her chickens in the court and her pigeons on the roof in a voice that I had never heard from her before. It was declared that we should be betrothed the day after Pentecost. My mother went down into the valley to invite the relations, to speak to the notary, and to engage the bell-ringer to be ready on that morning.

III.

From that moment Denise and I began to speak to one another. That is to say, sir, that when she milked I went with her to the shed and held the goat by the horns, whilst she knelt on the dry leaves of which the litter was composed, and sometimes raised her face towards me with a smile, in play; and that I carried her armful of hay or broom on my shoulder when she came back in the evening or at noon from the field or the fallows, while she let her arms hang by her side, and amused herself by eating the wild plums that the birds had left in the winter, or in gathering white mulleins and poppies.

On Sundays and fête-days she put on, more frequently, her dress trimmed with velvet lacing and her shoes, and we two went down alone together to the shop near the church, where we bought sometimes a plate, sometimes a flat-iron, sometimes a knife, or, perhaps, a hundred pins, or a yard of black lace, against the time when we should be married. On the way, we amused ourselves with trying who could run quickest down the slippery grass slopes of the mountain; who could leap best over the trenches that were made to water the meadows; who could first discover the brightest stone under the running water, the loveliest flower under the moss, the prettiest nest under the bushes. Sometimes we held each other's hands by the end of the fingers, and walked on without saying a word, like two children going home from

school. This is what we call amongst us, speaking with one another, as I have told you.

IV.

Most frequently we sat down apart from the others upon the rocks, where the warm moss grew yellow under the sun, there, on the edge of the deep ravine, whence we heard the water murmuring over the stones at the bottom, alas ! as it murmurs now, sir. This made us dream, so Denise told my mother. The sun high in the heavens overhead, the darkness below in the depth under our feet in the ravine ; the brink of the abyss, over which hung those great branches that seemed to look down into it as if their leaves had eyes ; the blackbirds, that rose from their nests with noise enough to frighten little girls ; the chaffinches chirping on the cherry-tree, or the larks singing in the blue air ; the lizards on the rocks looking at us ; the sound of our own breath, which we could hear softly when the birds were silent, and which made us feel we were two ; it was among these things, sir, that we passed, during the greater part of our time, the hours—ah ! the beautiful hours of summer, while the weeks lasted, that we were speaking to one another. We had not walked, sir, we had rested the whole evening, and yet it seemed as if we could not rise from the rocks, and we dragged our feet along the ground as slowly and with as much feeling of fatigue as if we had laboured or weeded a whole day in the sun.

V.

I must tell everything ; I was not the same workman as before among my tools, nor she the same workwoman in the house. I went down late, I came up early, I worked at my trade without energy, I grew weary now of being alone, I who had formerly liked so much to see nothing near me but my own shadow. Denise, on her part, was not altogether the same as she had been in the fields, the shed, or about the hearth. She combed her hair more carefully before the glass that I had bought for her. She washed her feet, hands, and face oftener in the basin of the fountain, when the dust from the hay, or the barley that had been

thrashed in the barn, had powdered it ever so little. Her coarse hempen chemises were better plaited in front since I had given her the flat-iron. Sometimes she would even kindly let me put the white flowers of the brier roses in her hair. "Oh! if you could see how beautiful she looks with her flowers off the bushes!" said Annette to the poor blind Gratiou; and she described to him the beauty of his cousin, and how the white flowers shone like stars in Denise's hair, and how the leaves hanging down threw little shadows on her cheeks.

VI.

It appeared that Denise also found the days long at home as I found them long in the quarry. For, now, before she heard twelve strike on the clock of Saint Point, she took up her basket of woven willow wands, at the bottom of which she put a linen napkin, and quite alone, she brought me my bread, milk, butter, and salt to the quarry. She no longer felt any fear of meeting me, nor even of remaining *tête-à-tête* with me at the farthest end of the quarry or the cave. But I did not wish her to come down there for fear of her cutting her beautiful naked feet on the sharp-edged rubbish lying about where I had been at work. As soon as I heard her coming, I climbed up to the top, took the basket, and sat down to eat my meal above the quarry under the great oak tree, the uncovered roots of which hung over the precipice like serpents fastened to the branches by their heads, while they let their tails wave about downwards. Then she took what she had brought out of the basket; spread the coarse linen napkin on the grass, and remained standing there, leaning against a tree, to see me eat and drink. It was in vain I said to her, "Sit down then Denise, and eat a morsel with me!" She laughed, and said, "No; that was all very well when we had not spoken yet, and I was only your cousin; but now that I am engaged to you, and that you will soon be my master, I must serve you, and not sit down and eat before you."

It is the custom of the country, sir; I had nothing to say; but I repented myself by purposely letting some of my bread fall on the ground, that I might touch her feet with my lips, as if by chance, when I picked it up. She blushed and

moved them back. This was the way we passed the time, sir.

VII.

Alas! sir, we were so happy that we only thought of ourselves. This happens too often. Denise never observed that during her long absences from the house, and during our long walks among the rocks, and our dreamy-rests at the edge of the ravine, poor Gratien, who, till that time, had never left her any more than the border of her apron, was often left quite alone with Annette or the little dog. He remained wherever they placed him, sometimes on a stone in the sun in the court, sometimes on the grass under the service-tree, not daring to come where he knew we were, because he saw clearly, without our having to tell him, that we liked better to be two than three, and also because we spoke in a lower tone when he was by us. We always said some kind word to him when he came or went away, and he answered us with love and gentleness; but it was no matter, he dimly perceived, for the first time, that he was an incumbrance to Denise.

VIII.

He talked as much as he could to Annette, whom, at least, he tried in this way to keep by him; and it was from her that we knew what he said.

"Stay with me," said he, "my little Annette. You see clearly that Denise no longer has need either of you or of me. She is not like what she used to be; neither you nor I are good enough for her now. She must always be in the quarry, or under the walnut-trees, or at the stream with Claude. It is quite right, you know. They love one another, they are betrothed, they are going to be married, they have other cares now than thoughts of us."

And Gratien turned away his face from the little girl, that she might not see the large tears that rolled from his darkened eyes over his cheeks. The little girl herself became quite sad with the sorrow of her brother Gratien, but she was obliged to leave him to take the goats to the heath, because Denise had neither time nor inclination to go there

as she used to do. What would people have said to see a tall beautiful girl like her, just going to be betrothed, keeping the kids all day, sitting on a rock spinning with her distaff? This was right when she was a child, and would be when she became old, but now I was the world to her. She would have been humbled in my eyes. She had only done the farm-work since she had begun to feel herself, as it were, the wife of her cousin. She was so full of her love for him, that, sometimes, she involuntarily forgot work at all. And I, sir, must confess in truth also, I saw no one but Denise with my eyes, in my heart, in my dreams at night, in my work by day, within me and without me. It seemed to me that the whole world, heaven and earth, had entered into me with her, and that, beyond her and me, there was nothing living. Ah! how wrong it was, sir, thus to refer everything to our two selves, to feel our own happiness so much that we did not feel the misfortune of another,—and how well has God punished me for it.

The nearer the day of our betrothal approached, the less we quitted one another.

IX.

Sometimes we remained long after it grew dark talking softly together under the service-tree near the house, or on the margin of the fountain, after I had drawn her pail of water from the well. The flame of the fire my mother had lighted on the hearth had shone for a long while through the windows or the chinks of the door before we could make up our minds to go in. The little girl was obliged to call us in to supper two or three times. I leave you to imagine what the soul of Gratien suffered as he sat with his feet on the andirons of the hearth, and his face buried in his hands, hearing nothing but the crackling of the broom as it burned, and the clattering of the mother's sabots about the house. Where was the voice and friendly laugh of his dear Denise? All had been night with him since his misfortune, sir; but since my happiness all had also been silence round the poor fellow. His heart was breaking, and we never suspected it. Since we were so happy, must not everybody be so too? What a way of reasoning, is it not? Nevertheless, it is the way of hearts that are full of joy.

X.

One Sunday evening we had stayed out later than on any other day, for it was the last Sunday that had to pass before the one on which we were to be betrothed; and we said to one another, "In eight days more, Denise!"—"Only one week, Claude!" We felt so happy at this blessedness so near us, and which it seemed as if nothing could now prevent, that we felt as if we could not walk any farther to get back to the hut. It was as warm as if the wind came out of the mouth of an oven that had been lighted in the morning with some sweet-scented faggots: There were small clouds like flocks of lambs over the stars. We looked at them in silence. We had unconsciously climbed up high, very high above this rock to the place where the ravine sinks perpendicularly, like an abyss between precipices of red sand, and where we had put a hedge of dry thorns between the trunks of the trees to prevent the animals from falling down. Denise was standing up leaning against the white trunk of a birch-tree, and I within six paces of her, with my arm round the stem of a young chestnut, leaning my head against its bark. What we thought, thus in repose, in the presence of the earth, and trees, and stars, hearing our hearts beat against the wood, the wind knows. What we said by a word at a time every quarter of an hour, the leaves alone can tell; but I well know that we never thought of going home. Does time make itself felt, sir, when the heart has stopped, and does not tell the hour by any trouble or any desire?

XI.

We knew not at all then what o'clock it was. But it appears that it was near midnight, and that not seeing us return, though it was so late, my mother and Gratien had felt very anxious about us. As to us, we were so full of peace, that we heard even the sound of the leaves. But suddenly—on the side of the ravine opposite to that on which we stood, we heard a slight noise as of a stick beating the branches to make the birds fly off their nests—then footsteps on the grass—then a loud cry—then a fall of something or some one downwards, like a heavy stone, to the bottom of the water, sixty feet below the trees!—then nothing!—sir.

XII.

Denise rushed towards me, uttering a low cry of terror, and I towards her. A thought occurred to her instantly—If it should be Gratien ! I hurried on in front of her, seeking the entrance of the path in the rock which, at the distance of six paces from where we were, my father had made, to enable my mother to go down to the water to wash the lambs. Denise followed me, holding my jacket with one hand, and clinging to the mosses and ivy on the declivity with the other. We heard, as we got near the bottom, a sound like the convulsive agitation of some one's arms in shallow water, and his stifled moans under the inability to draw his breath.

"Gratien, my Gratien ! is it you ?" cried Denise to him.

I already held him in my arms, sir—my poor brother, half dead—it was he !

We placed him on the bank. He regained consciousness, and the power of speech. But would you believe that, instead of thanking God and us, sir, he said, in an under-tone, not expecting to be overheard, "What a misfortune !" We did not well understand whether he meant the misfortune of having fallen down, or that of having been rescued after his fall ; but his words afterwards gave me a suspicion that, not being able to endure his isolation any longer, he had intended to destroy himself ; still he might have fallen accidentally while seeking us, and mistaking one tree for another. When I mentioned it next day to my mother, she put her finger on her lips, and said, "Never think of it again, Claude : even to dream of it would be a crime towards the good God."

XIII.

Poor Gratien had not broken any bone, sir ; but he was so stupified and so bruised all over his body by his fall to the bottom of the abyss, that he could make no efforts to help himself to get out of the water, and to climb the steps that were cut out in the rock. I carried him on my shoulder like a stone in the quarry ; Denise supported his head behind me. In this manner we reached the trees at the brink ; we carried him faint and shivering into the house, and laid him

down in the shed between the sheep, who warmed him with their bodies and their breath. My mother, Annette, and Denise uttered cries as if the wolf had carried off the lambs. All was desolation and confusion in the hut. At last the warmth of the shed and the embraces of the women completely brought Gratiou back to life. He said, that seeing his mother's anxiety at our prolonged absence, he went along the ravine to seek us, and that while seeking us he had mistaken the path, lost his footing, and rolled to the bottom of the precipice.

Notwithstanding, if he had really been looking for us, he would certainly have shouted or called so as to be heard at a distance in the darkness by Denise and me. But we had heard no cry whatever before the noise of his fall; he had not called out, therefore. This tended to increase my suspicion that he had thrown himself down the precipice on purpose, because he could not endure the state of isolation to which my marriage with Denise was about to condemn him.

XIV.

Denise on her part appeared to have so much of the same kind of suspicion, that when the morning broke, and we once more saw each other by the side of my poor blind brother in the shed, she became red as fire, then pale as death, at the sound of my voice. She did not raise her eyes towards me, and my presence seemed as it were to give her a mortal blow in the heart. When I would have approached her as we crossed the court, she said to me in a low voice, "Ah, Claude, what a misfortune! and to think that it is I who am the cause, by having felt too happy in being always with you, and having abandoned your brother so completely to his unfortunate lot and his sorrow! Your mother has reproached me with it all night, while Gratiou, burning with fever, talked in his sleep in the shed, and we gave him drink. 'Denise!' he cried, 'Denise! it is she who is killing me! Why did she light up my way with her hand all my life, since she was going to abandon me at last on the mountain? What will become of me when my mother is dead, and Denise occupied all day in her house, and with her husband and children? Oh! why did they take me out of the

abyss? Let them throw me in again! let them throw me in again, mother! Why did they bring me back to the sun, since I was never again to see the light, either from the sun, or through her eyes?"

"And your mother hearing this, said to me, 'Miserable girl! It is all your fault! What occasion had you to be all day hanging to your betrothed's jacket or his shadow? Was it for that, God and I trusted his blind brother to you?'

"She was right, Claude; we have been very guilty in having thought so much, you of me and I of you, that we thought of no one else! We must punish ourselves for it, or else God will punish us!"

XV.

At these words a shudder of terror ran through my heart, and I made a sign to Denise to stop, as if fear made me divine what she was going to say to me. I suddenly saw all my misfortune, but I did not dare to own it to myself, as, trembling to face it, shutting my eyes and my heart as I did when I stood on the brink of the abyss and leaned over to see to the bottom of it, I started back affrighted.

We looked at each other, Denise and I, pressing each other's hands and weeping; then we went back into the shed.

Gratien was still weak and suffering from fever, but the morning air had relieved him a little. He no longer cried out, and seemed to try to look at us with his blind eyes so loving and full of tears that they filled us with pity. Denise went to him, took his hand, and talked to him in such sweet tender words, that poor Gratien began to smile, and seemed to become tranquil. And then I, a little comforted by seeing he felt better, left him to go to work.

I went down to the quarry in some little relief of mind, and tried to go on as usual to cheat my grief; but I often stopped in the middle of my work, agitated by wretched thoughts that came back and black upon me. To renounce Denise! the idea drove me to despair. I said to myself: "It is not possible; Gratien will get better; it was fever that made him say those things; all this will vanish with his

ness ; then, when he is well again, Denise and I will not neglect him ; she will be with him when I am at work, and on Sunday we will keep him company." In short, I tried, sir, to speak some consolation to my spirit. It was day and night by turns in my thoughts ; sometimes despondency was the strongest, sometimes hope prevailed, and notwithstanding all, I went up to Les Huttes in the evening in a little better spirits.

But Grätien's state drove my hopes away. He grew thinner visibly, and the whole of his poor body wasted ; the cares of Denise were in vain. I then saw, in spite of myself, that it was not his body alone that was sick ; the evil was strongest in his heart.

The fever constantly increased ; every night it returned with greater violence, and threw him into delirium. Grätien then began to call Denise, always Denise. As to me, I wept near our poor blind sufferer like all the rest of the family, and said softly and sadly to myself : "I must make the sacrifice to him."

I remained in this inanner for two months, struggling with my sorrow and my duty, resigned one day, rebellious the next, and unable to resolve to renounce Denise. In vain my mother implored me every day ; I yielded at one moment, softened by her tears and Grätien's sufferings, then I resisted again. In vain I prayed to God ; nothing could prevail. I worked no more, but stood in the quarry with my arms hanging down and my eyes full of woe, fixed on Les Huttes.

I had passed many days so, when one evening, as I was returning home, I heard the bell of Saint Point, which so gently leads the heart to thoughts of God. It affected me so deeply that I was seized with pious emotion as I listened. I prayed with hot tears running down my cheeks, thinking of Grätien, my sick brother, and remembering that my resistance caused the continuance of his illness and his suffering, and filled the house with sorrow. I felt that it was wicked thus to retard his recovery, that I must renounce Denise, and that God so willed it.

I reached Les Huttes, preparing in this way for my duty when I met Denise in the court, who seemed to be waiting for me. "Well, Claude," said she to me, "Grätien suffers-

much ; I fear that God will curse us if we let him perish in this manner. We must save our blind brother. You can see clearly ; you are able to earn your bread with your hands ; there are many girls in the country who would willingly be betrothed to you : everybody respects you as a first-rate workman, and one of excellent character ! Go away, and try to think no more of me ; but I must stay here to do my duty, to be servant to your mother and sister, or—to Gratien." She could not say the word wife !

She melted into tears as she spoke and ran away into the hay-shed to cry all day long. We could hear her sobs in the house through the openings of the floor.

My mother came next, and said to me in her turn : " Claude, it was I who told you that Denise and you must be betrothed. I thought it was the will of God, and for the good of the family. But now I see clearly that it would be a fault which the good God would punish, and which would bring more suffering on him who is already the most unhappy of us all, on my poor Gratien ! He loves Denise as much as you do ! perhaps even more, because she is only pleasure to you, but she is light to him ! What would you do ? Would you wish that your brother should no longer have a living staff to lead his steps, but should throughout the rest of his life fall at every step into the hollows of the roads, or the void in his own heart ? Or could you endure always to see there, solitary at the corner of the hearth, an unfortunate being, who would seem, at every breath he drew, to reproach and condemn you for your cruelty towards him ? "

" I will do whatever you command me, my mother, let it cost what it may. I love Denise better than the light of day in my eyes, that is true ! But I love peace in the family, obedience to your will, and the grace of God, better than my happiness. Command me then, my mother, and I will do what you say without a murmur."

" Very well ! Go away," said she, passing her arms round my neck, and sobbing on my head. " Go away, my poor Claude ! " and still she held me, and pressed me to her breast. As I raised my eyes towards the window of the hay-loft, I saw Denise, who had seen and heard everything, and was wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. I

heard, through her sobs, the words, "Good bye, Claude!" All was said, sir; I stifled the feeling in my heart, took my bag off the nail, and ran down the mountain without once looking back, lest I should see the smoke from the hut, and not be able to tear myself away. So it was, sir. Three months afterwards, Denise was married to the blind Graticien. She married him from obedience. She thought no more of me, and was a good wife to him.

CHAPTER IX.

I.

I. And you, what became of you, Claude, after this rending of both your hearts?

He. As to me, sir, I began my tour of France that very day.

I. Tell me about it, if it does not give you pain, and if the sun, which begins to get low, will allow us time.

He. Oh, that will soon be told. I was no longer with myself, I was no longer in the place where I was; I was wholly and entirely where I was not. My body wandered in those countries, but my heart and spirit remained on the mountain. Denise, my mother, Graticien, and Annette, were there. The rest of the world was all the same to me. But, it was then I began to think more, and almost always of the good God. The sacrifice that I had been obliged to make of all my happiness in this world had softened my soul, and, as it were, turned my heart upwards. The Lord rewarded me by making me, ignorant as I am, understand that his love was able to fill the void in my heart. And then I said to myself: "Since your mother has commanded you to make the greatest of sacrifices to your blind brother, all other sacrifices that you can make to others will be very easy and very light. Make them all, therefore, as many as you can find to make on your way. God will reward you; not in this world, because he has nothing more to give you here, now that he has taken away Denise, but in another life."

II.

And having said so to myself, sir, I went, for seven years, from town to town, and from workshop to workshop, with my matting-hammer and my large hammer, seeking work wherever it was to be found, and making myself as perfect in my trade as was practicable for a poor fellow who was already too old to learn to read, write, or trace designs with a pencil on paper. But as to stone, that I could manage as though it were paper. The masters liked me, and so did my companions, because I was faithful to the first, and, as far as I could, serviceable to the others.

III.

It was from this time, sir, that I made a resolution only to take as much wages as I wanted for my bread and clothes, the value of my tools, and my night's rest under some roof in a village, or in the workshops and houses where I was engaged. Only, I said nothing about it, for fear I should be taken for a man who wanted to seem singular. I took the price of my day's work, like anybody else, from the masters. But then, when I saw one of my fellow-workmen, who had grown old and was broken down and had the care of a family upon him; or when one of the young workmen had a father, mother, and sisters to keep by the labour of his hand; or finally, when any among them had met with an accident, had an illness, or were obliged to absent themselves, then I took their place in the workshop; I did their work, and they received their wages as usual. They had given me the nickname of "the substitute" in all the workshops, and if any one of the men wanted a day's rest, he naturally came to me and said, "Now, Claude, I want a good workman to take my place to-morrow;" and I went, sir.

IV

You will say to me, "why did you thus renounce your own interest, and use your tools, your time, and your youth, without the least thought of the future?" It was for this reason, sir; in losing the hope of marrying Denise, I had quite

resolved never to marry, because I might well have made the tour of France ten times over, and gone farther still, without ever finding another like Denise for me. What would you have? Even if I could have found another as engaging and more beautiful, it would not have been herself. We were two grains belonging to the same stalk. All the other grains might be equally good, but it was those two, nevertheless, which had been placed next each other, which fitted and knew each other on the ear. Denise being lost to me, there was no woman left in the world for me. All those that I saw passing on Sundays going to dances or to churches, only made me say "That is not Denise!" She had left an impression on my eyes like a dazzling light, which seems to make you see a thousand stars, but also to make the tears come. "Since you have made this sacrifice to your poor blind brother and to the peace of the family," I used to say to myself, "you may well continue to make sacrifices all your life!" And in truth, that little matter I now did for the poor cost me nothing. When you have given away the heart that beats in your breast, what is it to give your arm or your hand? And besides, I had the love of all the men in the workshops for my reward.

In this manner I spent seven years in making my tour of France, always taking a road that would lead me further off; every time that I was tempted by home-sickness to go back to the mountain and valley of Saint Point.

V.

"But what consoled you in your absence, your isolation, and your sorrows?" said I to Claude. "You received news, I suppose, of your mother and Denise? you wrote to them? you had some friend with whom you could talk of Les Huttes, of your childhood, your love, and your misfortunes?"

"No, sir; no one wrote to me, and I wrote to no one, because, in our family, we neither knew how to read nor write. I never talked either of her or of myself; no one even knew from what mountain I came. I was on good terms with all my fellow workmen, without having any special friendship for any one among them, unless it happened that one had fallen off a ladder or broken a limb in

the workshop. But yet I had a friend who consoled me and sustained me through all," said he, raising his eyes towards the setting sun, so slightly that no one but myself would have observed it.

"You will tell me about that next Sunday?" said I, rising to take leave of him, "will you not, Claude? You have told me enough already to make me sorrowful the whole week."

"Oh, sir, we must never be sorrowful," returned he, with a bright smile, which contrasted strangely with his narrative; with the solitude around him, and the green graves under our feet. "We must never be sorrowful, for sorrow takes the strength out of the arms; and then life is so small a thing, that it is not even worth stopping to weep over. All will end well, sir; be sure of that. It is only needful to wait for the appointed hour, either here below or in 'that other time.'"

"What do you mean by 'that other time?'" said I.

"That which will never end," replied he.

We separated like two friends whose eyes say, as they take leave, "let us meet again."

CHAPTER X.

I.

I LOVED this poor man, and he loved me, far beneath him as I was in philosophy, in sensibility to supernatural things, in abstraction, and in resignation, and plunged as I was in the current of human thoughts, above which he shone like a mountain-top above the mist. Nevertheless, we had something in common between us,—the sensation of the divinity in nature. This was the magnet that attracted me towards Les Huttes, and made Claude endure my long visits. I went up to his retreat a week after my last visit.

I found him occupied in hiving a swarm of bees. The swarm was whirling round in the limpid air over his head, striving at the same time to take to flight and to remain in the enclosure. It seemed to struggle between two opposing interests; one of liberty, the other of regret. When it had

settled on a plum-tree, Claude swept it with his hands, without being stung, into the hollow trunk of a pine-tree which he had prepared for his bees.

“Here is a new family which has come to me this week, sir,” said he. “It has not come without being called at its appointed hour. See,” he added, showing me about twenty plants of sainfoin in flower, “the table was spread for all these guests invited to the feast by the good God; is it not so?” he added.

“And the house also,” said I to him, pointing to the hollowed trunk already placed by him on two stones. But how is it, Claude, that you keep your face untouched and your hands safe among that cloud of flying darts, which would pierce me with thousands and thousands of wounds?”

“It must be because they have known me from mothers to daughters, from hives to swarms, and even before they came out into the sun for the first time. It seems as if their mother, or it may be God, had said to them, ‘Do not hurt him who wishes you well.’ People think that animals have no education; but this is quite a mistake. Why is it then that flights of rooks allow themselves to be approached by a man who is carrying a shining ploughshare over his shoulder, but take flight at the appearance of one with a gun under his arm? Do you not suppose that their father and mother have taught them what gunpowder is? And small fishes, sir; I often amused myself on Sunday, when I was a boy, with catching them in my hands at the edge of the stream, putting them in my hat, and dropping them down on the grass at a distance from the water. Very well! though it was so far from the bed of the stream, and though the height of the grass hid the sight of the water from them, they all returned to it of themselves, without losing their way, sir. How could they have done so if it had not been taught them when they came out of the egg?”

We talked in this manner for a long time on the phenomena of animal intelligence, and then I insensibly gave a more serious turn to the conversation. He lent himself to this, because he felt that it was not so much a human as a divine curiosity which drew me towards him; the happiness, that is to say, of talking with him concerning God.

II.

Such was the attraction between this man and me. I did not easily detach my thoughts from him. When, from the end of my garden, or the upper parts of my woods, situated on the opposite side of the valley, in the silence of the middle of the day, I heard the regular stroke of the mason's hammer, my ear received this sound as a murmur the more of a poor insect called man who hollows the rock, probes the earth, and studies the sky, there to seek him who calls him without ceasing, and flies him eternally, his God ! I said to myself, "Every stroke of that man's chisel is also an effort of his mind to enlarge itself in proportion to the great idea after which he is struggling." I asked the question of myself conscientiously,—of myself, who, with all my superior advantages, have used my tongue and my eyes in speaking, reading, and writing of God at all times and in all languages, what ideas this unlearned soul could have conceived alone and unassisted of the sovereign being.

I was then naturally led, when I again found myself with him, to renew our conversation on this subject ; besides, I saw that this was the natural inclination of his soul, overflowing with instinctive piety, and ready at the slightest touch to let it gush forth. I sat down, therefore, on the same place in which I had talked to him about Denise, and when he had finished placing his hive upright on the stand, he returned and seated himself at a little distance opposite to me ; for, confiding and simple as Claude was in his manners and language, he was not familiar. He possessed that natural politeness which commands respect by always showing it. He kept his distance like a good foot soldier, whose place it is neither to allow himself to be overtaken by him who marches behind him, nor to tread on the foot of him who marches before him. He felt and noted his place in the creation, as he felt and noted the place of others. A sense of propriety, that was all his own, and not acquired, enveloped him with a natural dignity. You could see that he felt himself little among men, but respected himself in God. The following is nearly literally our conversation of that day.

I. You told me, Claude, a week ago, in relating your sor-

rows to me, that you had a friend into whose bosom you poured them all; and who a little softened them during your long absence from Les Huttes. Who was this friend who thus supplied the place of your mother, Denise, your mountain, and even your heart, which you had left there?

He. I am very bold, sir, perhaps, to have dared to use that name; he will pardon me, sir;—it was the good God.

I. And who had spoken to you of him?

He. Scarcely any one, sir; but it was he himself who had all my life spoken in my heart.

I. And what did he say to you? and what did you say to him in those inward communings with him, which rendered you so patient under your own sufferings; and so servicable to others?

He. What he said to me, sir, it would be quite impossible for me to tell you, for God does not speak the language of learned men like you, nor the *patois* of simple men like me. I know not how he made himself heard by my feeble spirit, but I heard him within me, when I retired from the noise of my companions to listen to him, as we hear from this spot, sir, the great universal murmur which rises from the valley; without knowing whether it is produced by persons' voices, steps of men, leaves, waters, plants growing, birds singing, men breathing; yet, knowing that it is produced by something living; or whence this sound?

Well! this low sound from the presence of the Lord in his creatures and in me, I have happily always heard it, as I tell you; and I say "happily," sir, for without it I should have believed myself dead,—I should have thought that my breast was a grave where a soul was buried, which still lived alone, with only earth-worms for company. I should have thrown myself into the first quarry that I met with, that I might crush my mind and my head against the points of the rock. But thanks to this feeling of the presence of God, and to his low but clear voice that I heard, especially when I had nothing to do, and went at night to the place where I slept in the workshop under the shed; thanks to the goodness which he then showed me, and has always shown me, in saying some sweet words to my heart, I always felt consolation. Man is like an infant whom they rock in his

cradle, singing words to him that he does not understand, till he smiles after his tears. Is it not true, sir? I was like that. I never knew what the good God said to me; but only to hear him from afar off comforted me, sustained me, made me patient and hopeful. It appears, sir, that the least word from on high within us, spreads, only from the echo in our hearts, much light, comprehension, faith, and peace, throughout our imbecility, our mist, and our trouble. It must be so, I think; for that word which made all the world by only calling all the creatures one after the other, and making them appear and answer,—think what its strength must be! And when it deigns to make itself heard by poor worms of the earth such as we are, think if that must not console us in our nothingness!

I. Oh yes, Claude, I do not doubt it; you heard within you the echo of the eternal word, better perhaps than any other man, ignorant, though you are, according to the ideas of men of the world. You had, between you and this word, only the sound of your hammer,—we have that of the world; but still, how did you know that God spoke to your soul, and by what signs did you feel that he thus conversed alone with you?

He. It was thus, sir. There came ideas to me that I had never conceived of myself, and that no one had ever said to me: there arose within me warm emotions out of my heart, which no hand had ever touched; there spread within me a sort of intoxication, though I had never tasted wine. Then I heard all sorts of obscure things, impossible to repeat with the few words that my mother taught me when I came into the world. I do not know how it was said to me, but it was said. "I am, I live, I endure, I create, I see, I hear, I love, I console, I come, and all comes to me, and all that has begun in me ends in me! And when all that began in me shall have returned to me, all will be powerful, happy, and eternal, by me and with me! And I am neither great nor little, for I am all things to everything and every creature! And I despise nothing, and I measure nothing; and nothing is either great or little with me; for with me, who am without measure, the small and the great do not exist! and I am thy father as I am the father of the sun which is over thy head! and I am thy mother as I am the

mother of the stars which are in the depths of thy firmament! and I am thy judge as I am the judge of all that accomplishes or transgresses my laws in intention! and I am thy friend as I am the friend of all that has issued from my own life to live! and I am thy consoler, for it is by my will and for my will that thou sufferest! and thou mayest speak to me as to a faithful friend, for I hear thee before thou speakest! And I am high and I am low, and I am before and I am after; and I am an ocean wherein thou mayest throw all thy desires, thy sorrows, thy hopes, without any fear that a single breath, a single drop of thy sweat, or a single tear will be lost, for I restore back everything. I am the heaven of all, the depths of all, the shore of all, and nothing can flee from me except into nonentity; and nonentity is only a word of shallow men! there is no nonentity! I fill it! My true name is life!"

And a thousand things like that, sir, which I heard, and which I believed I understood a little, far as they were above my comprehension. And after this word had moved me a little, as the stroke of the bell stirs the air by the vibration of the metal, before diffusing in it the music of the *angelus* among the leaves, which tremble as the music passes through them; after, I say, sir, this word had thrilled me for a moment, it shed over me a music, a peace, a light, so great, that it might have been said, so happy did I feel, that a star had descended from the sky to lighten my inner spirit, or that a hand had tuned all the strings of my heart, head, and body, as the organist tunes his threads of brass and his pipes, so that I myself became an instrument which sounded true, and upon which the hand of God might almost play within me!

These were sweet moments in the midst of my sorrow, sir; they sometimes made tears flow from my bodily eyes, but they wiped the tears away from my soul when my poor heart wept too much over the memory of Denise. And, besides, I accustomed myself to pray without ceasing.

I. You think, then, that the Lord is like a man who does not exactly know what he wills, and who allows himself to be influenced this way or the other way by prayer, and the tears of the last speaker?

He. Oh no, sir; but I think that God, when he created

us to do his will, foresaw that we should have need of prayer, and that, during our sojourn on the earth or elsewhere, he himself gave to his poor creatures, such as we are, an instinct to ask of him what we desire, were it only to maintain us in a state of adoration, desire, and gratitude, before him continually. He does whatever he wills; but we do all that he inspires within us when we pray to him. To ask and to receive, is not this the whole of man's life, sir? Why then should not we, who ask everything from those who have so little to give, ask without ceasing, of him who has everything? I know very well that it is said, "But the whole will of God is eternal and immutable like himself; it is therefore useless to seek to change it by prayer." But, as to me, I think that he foresaw from all eternity that we should ask him by prayer for such or such a grace; and that he also granted it in advance from all eternity in answer to the prayer that we should make to him, in such a manner as that this so-called change in his will is only at bottom the eternal accomplishment of it. I sometimes say to myself: "The Lord is like the architect of a dome of iron such as I have seen, in which room is left between the materials that compose its frame-work, in order that the iron may freely stretch or shrink according to the season, without risk of injuring its mechanism." This plan of the heavenly architect, sir, which gives effect to his immutable will by giving effect to the invocation of men, I believe is accomplished by prayer. I say it very obscurely, but we are all at fault when we talk of God. Besides (he continued), even though it should be useless, it is always so consoling to raise our words upwards.

I. And what prayers did you make to him oftenest, Claude?

He. Oh! I should sooner recall, sir, the impression of every breath which has passed my lips since I began to live than the words and sounds of all the prayers that I have addressed to him, for truly almost as many prayers have issued from my heart. Indeed, my heart has swelled within me with its sighs.

First, I knew the prayer that my mother taught me by heart when I was little—the prayer of Jesus Christ, which he left to men as a language that would be heard above:

"Our Father, which art in heaven!"—You know? It contains almost all that we can ask for. It is like a piece of money in the pocket, for which they will give you a bit of bread everywhere.

I. But every one ought to make his own prayers, Claude, for each has his own wants. What prayers did you most habitually make for yourself?

He. Oh, they were as different as day from night. They were according to the time, the wind, the sun, the rain—according to the impression that I received from everything; it was rather a conversation than a prayer: I breathed aloud,—that was all.

I. And what did you most frequently ask in your prayers?

He. Ah! sir, you know very well without my telling you. I asked first daily bread and peace of heart for my mother, my brother, my sister, and Denise, that the good God would visit them at Les Huttes night and day, winter and summer, spring and autumn, and that he would spread a blessing upon each of their days; above all, that they might have no sorrow because of me.

I. And what did you ask for yourself?

He. Oh, not much for myself; I want so little. I only asked to spend my life in serving those more unhappy than myself, to pass my time honestly in the state in which God had placed me in this world, and to be re-united with Denise in his bosom, to love him and to love one another without end. As to all the rest, everything was the same to me; a God—a love—an eternity—that might well be sufficient to a poor peasant like me. I have never had an ambition for riches, nor science, nor for commanding others. I have only felt the need of loving and of rendering happy, according to my power, those around me.

I. You say you have never had an ambition for science; but that Being on whom you have meditated ever since you were born is the supreme science. Have you never sought to hear him spoken of by those more learned than yourself, to know the different names that have been given him in the different ages of the earth, in the different languages and various worship of its people? In a word, you who were all love and all prayer before the Sovereign Ruler of us all,

did you not recite before him any act of faith in him, a *credo*, as they say in Latin in church? And what was that *credo* that you doubtless composed for yourself in your perpetual adoration? * * *

He. Oh, sir, my *credo* was not long. It consisted but of few words: "Thou art before all, thou art everywhere, and thou wilt be after all. I came out from thee, I shall be recalled to thee; I can know nothing without thee. I desire to believe of thee that which it will please thee to make known to me; I cannot see farther than my eyes will enable me to do. It is for thee to paint thine image upon them as thou wilt, that I should adore thee. My spirit is narrow, I would willingly enlarge it; thou wilt enlarge it continually. Make me believe that which thou wilt. Thy insect that thou seest there, balancing itself on its wings over moss, cannot say its *credo* to the sun, cannot say to it, 'Thy rays are this or that,' but it says, 'I feel that thou art warm, and I bless thee.'" I was as simple as that fly, sir, and my *credo* was similar, I think, in the proportion which man bears to an insect.

I. But did no one speak to you of that God whom you so much loved, and teach you to adore him and serve him in such or such a faith?

He. No, sir; there were no churches open and no priests paid by the republic in those times. Every one believed what he pleased, and worshipped God according to his fancy. There were some, even, who did not adore him at all, because they said that the priests had taken the part of kings and rulers in order to get them on their side, and thus to possess the earth in his name. And though it should be so, I said to them, "Is it a reason for denying your father, that men have given him a false name, or made a false god in his name?" These men, who were called atheists, created much compassion in me, believe me. It seemed to me that they were more blind in soul than Gratien in his eyes. I avoided them as much as I could, and I prayed for them, in particular, as for creatures more unhappy than others. On the contrary, I felt myself attracted towards those who had a religion, no matter of what kind, and who knelt before something, no matter what, provided it was done earnestly, and in good faith, because, I said to myself:

"They have inward eyes like me, they see the good God under one figure or another; they, at least, try to see him, to know and to adore him! This does them honour, and makes them good: for it is possible to be very weak, but not to be wicked, when one believes oneself in the presence of the supreme goodness." I was glad, without knowing why, when they opened the temples again, and when the nation once more acknowledged a God, and all the forms of worship which were freely allowed. "Ah!" said I to myself, "we are now a people; before, we were only a herd."

I. And did you then choose a religion for yourself, to honour and serve God with this or that sect in a church, in a temple, or an association of brethren in sympathy with one another; to render homage and obedience to the sovereign master?

He. No, sir, I made none at that time, either with myself or others. I prayed and served all alone, according to my own idea, because, you must remember, I was moving continually from workshop to workshop, from town to town, from one district to another, and I frequented all kinds of societies among my fellow workmen, who had every kind of religion; here I found philosophers, there Catholics, there Protestants, there men with no faith at all. Each set declared their own opinions, and denounced others, while they waited for the time to persecute or kill them. I was not capable of judging among them. Only this I said within myself: "What grief and what shame that all these people should abuse one another in this manner in the name of their common father! and what a crime and impiety it is that they should all call for *gensdarmes*, executioners, and scaffolds, to imprison, torture, and kill those who do not see their cloud in the sky of the same colour and form as they do. If any among these religions is really of God, it must be the most merciful among them; for a religion which imprisons, burns, and curses, cannot flow from a good source, or must have been very much changed on its way, and instead of giving men the water of heaven to drink, gives them the blood shed by executioners." The only catechism I had then to enlighten me amidst all these religions through which I passed from one country to another, was: "Adore and pray with every one, and believe only with yourself."

For it is always good to adore and to pray with other men, but, sometimes, it is evil to believe with them, for they believe things against nature, and contrary to the greatness and goodness of God! In a word, as I said to myself, "Let them say what they like, without disputing with them about what you do not know, nor they either: believe that which is good with all, and reject what is evil!" This was the poor man's catechism that I made for myself, sir. And if you say to me, but who taught you to distinguish that which is good from that which is evil?—Ah, sir! I should not know very well how to answer you. * It was a voice within me, which I did not cause to speak, but which spoke of itself, and said yes or no, without dispute in my breast. It was the voice which learned men call conscience, and we poor people call the great good sense. It does not argue, but, nevertheless, it does not deceive. It says no word, but knows how to judge all things! There must be a last word in the depths of man's heart, sir, when he debates with himself, and knows not to whom to listen. Well, his conscience, this is the last word! And this last word of all, it is God who has written it within us, as men write the direction on sign-posts on the road, that people may not lose their way.

There was an old stonemason, an Hungarian, by birth, who had worked at I know not how many churches, temples, chapels, minarets, mosques, pagodas, and pyramids, throughout the world from a country which he called India, into Egypt, Turkey, Hungary, Germany, Rome, and Strasburg. There was no God for whom he had not hewn a stone, so that he was very sure, as he used sometimes to say, laughing, to find a friend in every part of Paradise. He had taken me into his friendship, because of my youth, my ignorance, and my good conduct, which made me rather seek companions among my old than my young fellow workmen, because there is always more sugar in the ripe fruit than the green. He knew how to read, and I did not. He had the kindness to read to me on Sundays out of his prayer books, and ancient histories of primitive times, that I listened to with continual pleasure and astonishment. Some of those histories made one adore the goodness of God, others caused tears of compassion over the adventures of poor families like ours, feeding their animals, and cultivating their furrow, like

us, in the deserts. There were others which created astonishment by telling of multitudes of gods, marriages of gods with the daughters of earth, deceptions, evil actions of different gods, who were guilty of tricks, stratagems, and crimes towards men. These books, which came from India, Arabia, Greece, and I do not know where, made me think and ponder over that heap of lies, mixed with that heap of truths permitted by God, and thus thrown before us by the ancients, in order that we should be eternally obliged to seek the gold dust in the pile of sand with the sweat of our brows. I said to myself; "It is the will of God, then, that the soul should work like the body to find its nourishment, since he has not winnowed the corn himself, but has thrown it to us mixed with the chaff, and since he makes as many weeds as ears of corn grow in the best-cultivated fields." This astonished me, but did not shock me, sir. God is the master; he knows why he has so ordered it; perhaps it is that we might think constantly of him, as we advance towards a perfect knowledge of him step by step; for, indeed, had we arrived at a perfect knowledge of him at the first step, we should not advance, we should not seek any more. Now, to live is to seek. Is it not so?

One finds, however, sometimes, in far-distant ages and places, truths and holy thoughts, which satisfy for centuries and centuries that hunger after truth and holiness which God has placed within men. Thus, this old man read to me by chance, some thoughts, as he called them, of great ancient sages inspired above other men with wisdom from on high. There were some of them whose names I have retained, such as Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Confucius, Cicero. These men, sir, had some thoughts on God which lighted up, so to speak, the night of my spirit, as the snow that has fallen from heaven for a thousand years on Mont Blanc, and has never melted, sheds light every morning and evening on the still dark plain of the flat country.

But, beyond all, there was a little book whose pages were curled and torn, from having been read and re-read by this old man, and out of which he always read to me, in conclusion, sermons so sweet, that they seemed to come from an elder brother speaking to his younger brothers, and parables so simple, so near the earth, that they seemed to come from

a mother who would lower the branch to let her child gather the nuts. It was the New Testament, sir, which I have known better and practised better, since I have heard pages of it read, and lessons of good conduct drawn from it in our churches.

Ah! how I loved that divine man, sir, who came, they knew not whence, and associated, when quite young, with the poor; rejecting no one, talking with fishermen and gardeners, as he would with the learned; pardoning, in the name of God, despised but repentant women; caressing little children; untiringly teaching his people; sacrificing himself to the vengeance of the Jewish priests, who persecuted him, because they were darkness, and he was light; and finally allowing himself to be crucified by the rulers of the country. Why? That he might not lie to his Father, who spoke in him, and that he might purchase, at the price of his blood, a purer worship for his Creator. Ah! what beautiful ideas of God did he teach upon the Mount! How deeply was it felt that here was a true teaching, a "word," as it is written, a rising of the sun over the soul of a world lost in dreams of false gods! How truly was he whom he revealed the true God, the only God! Without father or mother, without country or nation, without friends or enemies, without anger or thunderbolts, the father, mother, and brother of all, of pagans as well as Hebrews, of the learned and the ignorant, of the high and the low! And how worthy of Him was his prophet! How deeply was he filled with the Father's love for the creation; for he desired to create anew the corrupt world, full as it was of lies and of false gods, by giving his own life for it! Is it possible to show more love to the Creator and to men? To die, that men may worship God more holily! To die, that He may shine more clearly on the world! What love could be greater! Fire is known by its heat. His soul must have seen God very brightly, in order to be inspired by that brightness which burned within him, to offer himself as such a sacrifice to his Father for his brothers, and by the hands of his brothers! "Behold a word of God! Behold a son of the Father! Behold a brother of all who have been born, or shall be born of woman," said I, when the old man finished reading. "See, also, how a drop of his blood, falling from the cross upon the sand, has so pene-

trated even to the centre of the earth, that she still quivers under it for these two thousand years; and how his word has not ceased to resound, and will be mingled for ever with all other words, which will come, we know not whence, to add their sound to his, until the name of God shall be supreme on this globe of earth, and in those globes of fire!"

The old man smiled when he heard me, ignorant as I am, speak thus of the New Testament. "He was very glad to see the good seed take root in my poor spirit."

This was the way we talked while we read, and I felt the echo within me, like the nave of an empty church, where the stones that echo the voice of the priest seem to repeat the holy words, which, nevertheless, they do not comprehend.

I afterwards understood the old man's words better. Meanwhile, his reflections calmed me while they astonished me. Knowing nothing of the religions of others, I made a rule for myself to distinguish the good from the evil. I said to myself: "There is truth and falsehood in all,—there is the word of God, there are the inventions of men. How shall we separate truth from falsehood, in order to know that the Lord is here and man is there? It is very easy even for a poor man: he has only to discover by his conscience where good is and where evil is. Where good is, there is God: where evil is, there is man. Truth cannot produce evil, any more than light can produce darkness, or a dove hatch a viper. If, then, out of any form of faith there proceeds hatred, persecution, contempt, extermination, it is not from God. If there proceeds love of your neighbour, mutual support, compassion, self-sacrifice, the worship of the one God in spirit and in truth, it is all from him! And I shall pity the first without wishing them evil, and shall believe and adore with the second."

It was thus, sir, that in my lowliness I tried to make a religion for myself, and to serve my Creator according to his will with my small powers.

And it was then I said to myself: "But it is not sufficient to think of him and pray to him as you do when you rise, and when you lie down, and when you rest at noon, after eating your bread in the shade; you must show him besides that you are a faithful workman in his house on the earthth ;

you are willing to serve without pay, except your bread ; and that you will give all your wages to those who are weaker, more sick, or poorer than yourself." And you would scarcely believe, sir, how much better the Lord paid my day's labour into my heart, than the citizen or the master into my purse. It seemed to me that all the money that I took, not for myself, but that I might carry it in the evening to the wounded, or the sick ; to the wife, children, or infirm father and mother of my brother workman, made up a purse full of silver and gold which the good God himself emptied into my hands in the night, and the sound of this money in my ears always gave me new heart to work.

And when my brother workmen said to me, " But if you keep nothing for yourself, what will you do in your old age, Claude ? " " Oh ! " I replied, " I have a brother and sister at Les Huttes who will take me in and support me in my old age. This is why I need not think of myself : my father thought for me. I have a little property. I do not mean to marry. If I did, I should be obliged to earn money and economize for my wife and children. " And when my comrades and their sisters said to me, " Why will you not marry, Claude ? There are plenty in the country who would have you for your good heart and strong arm ! " Then, sir, I answered nothing ; I became red and pale by turns as I thought of Denise, and went away to look at the river flowing on, or to run among the clouds on the high mountains.

I went back thoughtfully to the village, not having dared on that day to probe deeper the heart of the poor stonemason.

CHAPTER XI.

I.

I WENT up the following Sunday, and found him at the end of the ravine, near the place where his blind brother had fallen down, or thrown himself from the top of the precipice on the night of his despair. He was seated near his goats, which browsed on the ends of the young branches that hung over the rocky points at the brink of the ravine. The noise

they made by tearing down the leaves, and displacing the gravel with their little sabots of horn, and the slight murmur of the rivulet over its pebbly bed, prevented Claude from hearing me. He was at the foot of a service-tree, the light and finely-shaped leaves of which rained down upon him and upon the grass around him, fine rays of sunshine amidst the shade like living glow-worms pursuing each other by night on the banks of a stream. Multitudes of birds sang, whistled, warbled, flew among the branches of oak, ash, beech, and wild cherry over his head. Some flowers, of the kinds that love darkness and dampness, variegated here and there the ragged carpet of turf, and hung in tufts and bunches over the deepest part of the ravine, as if to breathe the vapour of the water, to which they imparted a scent in return. The air of noon, falling from a calm and sunny sky, penetrated through the leafy dome overhead, and warmed the ordinary coolness of the ravine. Only small portions of blue sky could be seen through the branches, and the greenness of the leaves appeared more vivid and deep in contrast with the firmament. Insects rose in clouds from the water every time that a bird flew down to drink there. They floated like living mist above the foam of the stream; and when a ray of sun fell upon them, the brilliant colours of their wings glittered like rainbows arching over cascades of overflowing life.

II.

In the midst of this scene, invested with a much deeper enchantment to Claude's feeling than to mine, since it was the scene of his infancy and of his whole life, and he clothed it with all his impressions and recollections, Claude appeared to be absorbed in the contemplation of all that surrounded him. It might be said that he was a living, growing, or petrified portion of the place, and that he was as much rooted there as the trunk of the tree against which he was leaning. I carefully avoided disturbing him by any impatient or premature sound; I was curious to see this man live and to hear him breathe in the presence of God only.

He was, in fact, in that great presence, as he always was, through his thoughts and adorations; but he did not suspect that there was an eye and an ear between his soul and God.

III.

He unconsciously traced lines on the sand with the branch of a nut-tree still covered at the end with leaves, which he held in his hand. He sent small portions of gravel or little stones into the water with his foot, and seemed to listen with a kind of charm to the slightly plaintive ringing sound which they made as they fell to the bottom. He called first one goat, then another, by its name; he whistled to his dog; he watched the fluttering of the rays on the water; he leaned first on one arm, then on the other; he by turns shut and opened his heavy eyelid, as if to retain his thoughts, or to allow them to evaporate. There were long intervals during which his breath was heard no more than if he were dead; then long and inexhaustible respirations, as if he would have poured out his life in one breath. One could see that both calm and emotion existed in that soul, and that it resembled the sea, which breaks its majestic intervals of silence by equally majestic undulations. An inward enthusiasm evidently weighed on him, as God, the invisible Father, broods over his ocean. He prayed.

IV.

What would I not have given to translate into words that murmured prayer, that mute invocation, which thus passed between his lips and his heart! People have never noted the palpitations of a simple soul, a thousand times more beautiful, without doubt, than the hymns of poets, and the learned and studied prayers of those who make a profession of enthusiasm and contemplation. It was not granted to me to interpret anything beyond the impress of the inner feeling on his expression, his attitude, his gestures, and sometimes to hear the name of God, which he occasionally pronounced, at the same time inclining his face or raising his eyes towards the top of the trees. But in the accent with which he pronounced that name, there was a complete revelation of the presence and the holiness of his Creator. I also distinctly caught the name of Denis, and these words repeated eight or ten times: "Art thou there? Dost thou

"see me? Is it thou, Denise, who answerest me in my soul? Tell me when it will please the good God to unite us again? I am very impatient, perhaps; is it not so? It is very wrong of me not to know how to wait the will of the most High, which thou knowest now! But the mountain is so lonely without thee! Obtain for Claude the pity of God! Denise! Denise! how long my life seems!"—and some other words, confused and broken like these. Then, as if he were ashamed of his impatience, and blushed at having thus given way to his sorrow, he rose, wiped his eyes, smiled sally at the sun which he saw over head at the end of the ravine, and slowly ascended the slope on the side where I was. I then rustled the leaves, and moved forward as if I had only just arrived at Les Huttes, and as if I were going to seek Claude in the enclosure among the rocks. At this sound he recognized me, and saluted me with his cap in his hand and his hair floating in the wind. I pressed his hand with a feeling of true friendship, the return of which, on his part, I was conscious of, from the strong and trustful pressure with which he returned mine. We went on, talking as we went of the beauty of the season and the serenity of the day, to seat ourselves under the great chestnut, the trunk and roots of which were hollowed and calcined by the shepherd's fires lighted when he was a boy.

.V.

After having led back the conversation insensibly and by long and winding ways to himself and his past life, "Well! Claude," I said to him, "were you sufficiently happy in your life of devotion to your brothers during your tour of France; and did you think of nothing besides assisting them, of devotion to God, and of the books which the old man read to you upon the perfections of the Creator, and your destiny after this life?"

"Oh, sir," he replied, "I thought much also and too often of other things; of my own country, the mountain, my mother, my brother, my little sister, and Denise. The more I tried to drive away these ideas, which made my hammer heavy in my hand, and the taste of my bread bitter, the more did they constantly return, in spite of myself. My

fellow-workmen laughed at me and called me in jest, *the dreamer*. 'Tell us, Claude,' said they, 'have you forgotten some one in the stars, or lost something in the mountains, that you always look upwards and give these heavy sighs?' I became quite red with blushes, sir, and knew not what to answer. Alas! it was only too true that I had left everything and lost everything on the heights; and always when I went out of the towns to walk on my Sundays, or when I was crossing the plains of a country, I saw the tops of mountains like these, and the smoke of a hut or cottage rising behind pines, I could not take my eyes from them. When I put up my hand to shade my eyes, that I might see them better, I found my fingers all wet when I put my hand down. I said to myself, 'Perhaps everything goes on there as it did with us! There are, perhaps, ravines and rocks, goats browsing, waters that flow murmuring through the trenches, a hearth on which they throw faggots in flower to make the soup for the family, an old mother, a beautiful betrothed, a Denise!' And then I felt my limbs so weak that I could not walk, and was obliged to sit down by the side of a ditch in front of those high mountain chains whence these thoughts had descended into my heart. In short, sir, I had what we call the home sickness, nearly the only sickness that we mountaineers have. I suppose it comes because, as we have little to love around us, we set ourselves to love the spot of earth which has borne us. I think we are like this chestnut-tree, which, if it were transplanted, would remember with love the soil that nourished its roots."

VI.

"And then, sir, at many periods every day and night I allowed myself an instant of pain and pleasure by saying to myself, 'Let me think freely of them! What are they doing up there just at this moment, that my thoughts are upon them? It is night; they are coming home to the hut, they are lighting the fire for supper. It is morning; they are going out with their rakes and hoes over their shoulders to work in the meadow or the barley-field. It is noon; they are eating together in the shade in the corner of the field. It is evening; they are resting at the door, and perhaps they are

saying their prayers, and thinking of me while they pray ! It is spring ; they are washing the lambs at the fountain. It is summer ; they have brought the sheaves with withered poppies hanging from them to the thrashing-floor before the house, and as the flail falls on them, the dry stalks sound like threads of brass. Denise, my mother, and sister, with their naked feet, thrash them, whilst my poor brother shells the peas alone in a corner of the court, for fear of hurting any one with his flail. It is autumn ; they are thrashing the chestnuts. It is winter ; they are peeling the hemp, or cracking nuts to make oil, by the light of the little lamp in the shed among the sheep, for the sake of the warmth. But how many are there of them ? Is my mother there still ? Is she very much bent with age ? Do her hands, which had begun to grow thin, begin to shake ? Are there new children round the women's aprons, or in the cradles at the foot of the bed ?" Ah ! sir, I could never stop when I once began to picture all these things to myself, and bring them before my eyes, and ask myself all these questions, which I answered without knowing the truth, sometimes in one way, sometimes in another. They were like waking dreams,—nothing else !

VII.

And the more time went on, the faster did these thoughts cling to my spirit, like these ivies that cling the firmer to the walls the older they grow. At last, I could sometimes scarcely contain myself. I said to myself : " Come ! I will return there to-morrow ; have not seven years passed away ? Have not enough snow-flakes and dead leaves fallen on the path where we said adieu,—Denise and I ? Does she even think of me now, otherwise than as a sister thinks of her absent brother ? Has she not been married and happy for a long time ? Has she not several little ones that hang by her gown, or that she carries on her breast as she goes towards the rocks ? That fancy, which we had for one another formerly, has it not passed from her heart thousands of times over, as the water-drops of the snows melting in spring have passed thousands of times through the water-course in the ravine, never to be drawn back again the same ? Perhaps they would be very glad to see me ? Perhaps my mother

calls for me on her death-bed? Perhaps they have more mouths to feed in the family than they have arms to dig, to sow, and to reap? Perhaps they want a workman, and have no wages to give to a servant, and they say among themselves: 'Oh! if Claude were here!'" I seemed to hear them, sir, as if they had spoken in my ear or at my side.

VIII.

At last, without being able to give any account of it to myself, I insensibly drew near my own country, like the moth that flies round a lamp, even while people try to prevent it from burning itself. I went from Toulon to work at Barcelonnette in the Lower Alps; then to Grenoble; then to the quarries of Vienne in Dauphiné; then to the quarries of Couson, on the Saône, where they hew the stones for the city of Lyons; then to Belleville; then to Villefranche in Beaujolais; then to Mâcon, whence you can see the other side of the mountains where Les Huttes is situated, standing out dark against the evening sky like a half-ruined wall. Ah! when I was once there, I still held back my feet by my will, but I could not restrain my eyes. The moment I raised them above the stone I was cutting, they travelled of themselves towards those mountains. It was so difficult, sir, to say to myself, "In seven hours' journey you might satisfy yourself; you might be where you long to be; you might see those whom you long to see! But no! you shall not go; you shall confine yourself to looking at your country from afar! They shall not know yet that you are here, and that you have passed so near them!"

IX.

You will say to me, "But did you never send them news of yourself, and did you receive no news from them?" First, sir, neither I nor any one in the house knew how to read or write, and then I never met with a single workman from the mountain, who could tell me anything about the country. I must tell you, besides, that while desiring so much to know all that had happened to the family since my tour of France began, I yet feared to learn it. I know very well this is

a contradiction; but it is so. Have you never felt, sometimes, that man is, so to speak, double; and that while one part of him desires a thing, the other fears it. A single word from Les Huttes, then, had never come to me all this time, and not a word from me had reached Les Huttes. It was to me like another world, where I had lived before my death, and that I should not see again till after my resurrection.

X.

But since I had allowed myself to be drawn by my own will, and, also, as it were against my will, to come so near, and since I had been able to measure with my eyes all day long the small number of steps that it would be necessary to take to reach these mountains and see the family again, I was no longer so completely master of my limbs nor of my will. I was sometimes almost mad with my longing, sir; my heart beat as if it would escape from my breast, and go there without me.

I could not sleep, or I slept as if I were awake, seeing in my dreams all sorts of things about the house, which I could not banish from my eyes when I really awoke. I became still more silent than it had been my habit to be. I no longer felt an inclination to assist any one with my work, and to complete all, I scarcely prayed to God now, or if I did, I did not understand my own words when I muttered my prayers. Oh! it was a terrible time of my life! I often repented of having come so near, and very often, in the night, I formed the design of returning to Toulon or Bayonne, and remaining for ever so far, so very far off, that I should never again feel the temptation which now worked in my spirit. But when day returned, and I once more saw the mountain, it was all over with me, I felt as if the soles of my feet were made of lead; I could not go away.

XI.

That was exactly how I lived during those fifteen miserable days; and would to God that I had listened to the voice which held me back, instead of to that which called me to Les Huttes. But God knows best. I could not help it.

One night that I was quite unable to sleep, and my temples beat against my pillow like the wings of a bird which is trying to break its cage, I started up, dressed myself, without giving myself time to think of anything, took my bag on my back, and set off walking across the country in the midst of the darkness, without feeling the ground under my feet, as they say ghosts walk. I was covered with perspiration, but it was as cold as though some one had thrown a pail of water over my head. Before day broke on Mont Blanc, I was at the foot of the mountains. I ascended by the paths in the pine-woods almost without breathing, and without sitting down on any rock or stone. It seemed to me that I should mount and mount continually, without ever reaching the top. Notwithstanding, when the sun had risen and warmed me, and the light of day had restored me to a little reason, I said to myself, "Where are you going, and what are you going to do? Do you even know if your mother is alive? If your brother, happy with Denise, will not see you come back to the house with a feeling of jealousy, knowing that Denise gave you her heart before your mother gave him her hand. How do you know if the sight of you may not trouble the heart of Denise? How do you know if all the happiness of the family may not disappear at your arrival, as the shade of the trees is driven away by the sun? And if it should be so, to what end will you have been courageous and good once, and absent so many years of your youth, to lose in one hour all the fruits of your suffering? Would it not be better that they should all still believe you to be dead, as they must believe now, never having heard a word of you?"—in short, a thousand such things, sir; so that I made one step in advance and went back two, set off at a quick pace and then stopped, looking at the ground and the points of my shoes, immovable, out of breath, like a dead man walking. Ah! sir, it was a sorrowful walk—as if I were ascending a Calvary!

XII.

Not being able to resolve to go back again, nor to decide that I would go on, and seeing the noonday sun so bright, that the shepherds might recognize me from a distance, and carry the news of my return to the country to Les Huttes, I

dived into the thicket a little on one side of the path, and rested against a rock, hiding my face with my hands, to reflect. "No," said I to myself, "I cannot go back, I have gone too far. My heart is drawn thither by strings so strong, that if I tried to go the other way, it would remain behind. To-morrow I will see my mother's house ; I will know who is living and who is dead under my father's roof ; I will not go away until the voice of Denise has once more rejoiced my ears—if, at least, Denise still lives ! But I will not make myself seen ; I will wait here or there till night has come ; I will walk barefoot ; I will hold in my breath, not to awake the dog ; I will approach like a thief, alas ! to steal a single look of those whom I have loved so much, and so much regretted."

XIII.

While I thus communed with myself, my face bent on the ground, seeing nothing and hearing nothing without, I suddenly heard a broken voice, which I seemed to remember, and which called to me from the path : " Here you are, then, Monsieur Claude ! they said that you were dead, and that we should never see you again in the country ! It was not true, then ? How like a rich man you look now ! a good jacket, a hat that looks quite new, and strong shoes with nails in them ! Give me a sou for charity's sake. I am old *Sans aime* !" Trembling at the sound of this voice, I raised my head, and recognized the poor idiot, who had travelled the mountains with his wallet on his back since his childhood, and who was called in the country the Innocent, or *Sans aime*. Years had not changed him at all, except that the hair which appeared under his tattered woollen cap was white instead of grey, which it already was when I was a boy. Time glides over these poor idiot men, you see, sir, as the rain glides over the rocks, because they do not feel it pass. They are never old, because they are always children.

" Ah ! good day, my poor Innocent," said I to him ; " you remember me, then ? But what are they doing at Les Huttes ?"

I trembled at his answer.

" At Les Huttes ?" he replied. " Ah ! I do not know ; it is quite six years since I passed by Les Huttes, look you,

because they have got a new dog, that barks like a wolf. I run away when I have to pass the mountain, and look at their smoke from a distance; for fear the children should send the dog after me. I do not know what has become of the blind son, nor the mother, nor Denise, nor the little one; I have only seen the ruins on the rocks from a distance; but that is all. But what fine clothes and what beautiful shoes you have got."

XIV.

This obstinate admiration shown by the Innocent for my jacket and shoes, inspired me with an idea. I said to myself, "If I changed with him, and if I made use of his wallet, linen frock, cap, and sabots, to get near Les Huttes without their suspecting it is any one but the Innocent, I should be able to see and hear, and yet should not be recognized; and if I saw that they had no need of me in the house—well! I could return without having disturbed anything in anybody's heart. I had no difficulty in persuading the Innocent to change his sabots for my shoes, his linen frock for my jacket, and his ragged cloak and wallet for my hat. This done, I gave him five sous to go and do a message for me in a village eight leagues from the mountain, in order to get him to a distance from Les Huttes for two or three days. He set out quite contented, poor soul, and I went deeper into the pine-wood, for fear of being seen by some shepherd. I ate some crusts that the Innocent had left in his wallet, and drank out of the hollow of my hand at a spring that I had found when I used to keep the goats. I waited in this manner, praying to God and thinking of the house, till dark night had enveloped the pines. I put the idiot's sabots on the path, in order that he might find them when he returned, and went barefoot and silently towards Les Huttes.

XV.

Chance would have it that, as I drew near the house, where I saw a light shining, I was met by the dog, who was coming home from a solitary chase after some hare or rabbit among the rocks. He barked and made a rush at the beggar's rags to bite them. But I left the wallet between

his teeth, and, having called him in a low voice by his name, he let the rag fall, and came near me by degrees, growling less and less, like some one who is not sure whether he ought to laugh or be angry; then, having smelt at me still nearer, he knew me in his turn, covered me with caresses, and stayed by my side without thinking of leaving me again. In this manner no one in the house suspected my approach.

XVI.

It might be nearly two hours before midnight. Neither moon nor stars were to be seen in the sky; black clouds overspread everything. All was darkness except where a little light issued from a low window-pane, which opened in the wall at the end of the house, on that side which looks over the ravine. Nothing was to be heard except a slight whispering of the wind among the heath, the cautious labours of the moles under the bushes, and the murmuring of the running water in the depth of the great abyss, where I was sitting just now, sir. I stepped softly, very softly, taking great care not to roll a stone out of its place, nor to rustle the leaf of any wood with my naked feet. In proportion as I drew nearer, I felt more inclined to turn back without going any further, lest I should learn what it would give me afterwards more grief than I could bear to have learned. "Oh, God!" said I to myself, "if I should neither see my mother, nor my brother, nor Denise, around the hearth, but only strangers; faces of men, women, and children, who have come in as the ants by the path there, have taken possession of the house left vacant by the snail! What would become of me? Yes, yes, I had better turn back, satisfied with having once more seen the wall, the smoke, and the light of their lamp, and believing that all there is as it was in my time."

XVII.

Two or three times I stopped and made a step to ascend the place, whence I had come down. You would never believe, sir, that it was the dog that held me back, and forced me to return. He whined, he licked my feet, he took the corner of my rags in his mouth, as if to force me to

come back with him. I was frightened at the noise he might make, and continued to follow him. But to tell the truth, I no longer knew what I was doing, or what I was not doing. I was like those people who walk and think, it is said, in their sleep.

I did not dare, however, notwithstanding the efforts of the dog, to direct my steps towards the court and the house door. I went down into the ravine, and climbed up the opposite side, holding by the roots with my toes, and the grass with my hands. Having reached the top, I again climbed the rock that you see before you, that serves as a foundation for the hut, and found myself close to the wall beside the little window whence the light proceeded, which looked almost like a grated window outside, with the leafy branches and berries of our ivy.

XVIII.

I listened for a little while, but heard nothing except the low beating of my own heart, like the holter of a mill that is out of order. I separated little by little the berries and leaves of the ivy, and managed, without being heard, to make a narrow opening, by which I could see through the window what was going on in the house. But, at first, it was in vain I looked, I saw nothing but a mist of fire, so completely had the trouble and impatience of my spirit thrown a cloud over my sight. Gradually this cleared off, however, and I began to see a fire on the hearth, and some figures that moved round the flame, making their sabots sound on the flat paving-stones of the floor; but I could not yet determine whether they were men or women, old or young. "Oh! heaven," said I, "if I could only once see the form of Denise, it would strengthen me, and I should be able to see the others better." Then I turned cold in all my limbs, and said to myself: "But if she is no longer here!" Ah! what a moment it was, sir, what a moment! an eternity does not last longer than a moment like that!

XIX.

At last, either my eyes or the window became clearer

a large broom-faggot made a bright flame on the hearth, and lighted up all the room. "Denise, Denise!" I cried softly. It was she, sir, I had seen her distinctly by the fire-light. She had something in her hand like a cup that she had taken off the fire, and now carried towards the darker side of the room where a bed stood. I fell back, almost fainting, on a bundle of faggots that was on the rock, and it required some effort and time to enable me to stand up, and take my place at the window again. Then I could not only see, but I could distinctly hear a weak and tender voice, the voice of my mother, which said from the bed: "Thank you, my poor Denise! I give you a great deal of trouble, and make you go late to bed, and rise early; but thanks be to God you will not have this trouble long. The good God will not delay to give me rest."

Ah! sir, I understood that my mother was very ill, but that I should at least be able to bid her farewell, and to receive her blessing before she died. My heart melted, and my tears began to flow.

XX.

I passed my hand over the glass to wipe away the dimness made by my breath, which again prevented me from seeing everything in the room, and this was what I saw:—

First, my mother's stool near the fire was empty; the salt-box and bag of rye-flour stood on it. I understood that my mother had kept her bed for a long time, and that her place by the hearth was vacant,—for ever!

Then I saw the little three-legged walnut-tree stool, on which my brother used to sit every evening to peel hemp, upset, with its feet in the air, in one corner of the room. His staff, which he always kept between his knees even in the house, to feel about with from place to place, was leaning against the wall, among pickaxes and rakes, by the mantel-piece, and there were spiders' webs and dust over it. I had no doubt that my poor brother was dead, since the blind no longer wanted his staff. Oh God! in so short a time two places empty. I melted into tears again, and went away from the window for a minute, that they might not hear me sob within.

How frail and uncertain is our life, sir. Try to go away

for eight years from your chateau, which is now so full of inhabitants, of riches, and of tenderness, and then come back again to it—you would see. Ah, no, sir, I do not wish you to endure a single quarter of an hour like that !

XXI.

I came back to the window when I had dried my tears. Denise had just sat down by the fire to undress the children—for there were two little children, from four to six years old, who ran backwards and forwards with her, holding by her apron, wherever she went—I had forgotten to tell you so.

I could then see Denise easily, sir ; for she sat with her back to the door, and her face, well lighted by the flame, turned towards the window. Ah ! sir, she was not the same Denise that I had left. She was quite changed ; yet you could still recognize the beautiful young girl of eighteen in the young widow of six-and-twenty. It seemed as if it were only necessary to pass one's hand over the shadows on her face, and that beneath them she would be found the same as she was before my tour of France. She had on her worsted dress trimmed with black ; her cheeks were paler, the corners of her mouth more curled down towards the chin ; her eyes had a darker circle round them, as though she had received a slight bruise below the lids ; her figure was less full, her arms were still whiter, and though not much, yet they were certainly thinner. One, in short, who has not grown old, but who has suffered, or wept in the night, that was what Denise was like. Ah ! I could not take my eyes off her ; and I said to myself, "Poor Denise ! poor Denise ! why was I not here to save you your troubles and toils ? I love you better so, than when there was not a tear in the corner of your eyes, nor the slightest touch of grief on the skin of your cheeks. Oh, how much more do you charm me so than when you were younger and more beautiful. I cannot again be your betrothed ; but how I wish I could be your servant, without any other wages than the happiness of seeing you, and taking your little orphan children on my knees !"

XXII.

When she had half-undressed her two children,—that is to say, a little boy of six or seven, and a girl of from four to five,—and I could see their little rosy shoulders peeping out of their clean linen chemises,—she made them kneel in front of her ; and I heard them repeat the *Pater* in a low voice after her, with their hands joined together, half-asleep as they were. Oh how beautiful it was, sir, to see that young woman with her little ones, whose father God had taken, left all alone in the midst of the mountain at night, by the side of an old dying woman, making her children speak of their Father in heaven, whom their eyes had not seen, as if they had seen him, and kissing them afterwards on the forehead or mouth, to reward them for having said his name plainly after her.

When this was finished, I heard her say to them, “ Now that you have said your prayer to the good God for ourselves, my little children, we must end by saying a prayer for others ; ” and, as if to fix their attention by something visible, she stretched out her left hand towards the wall, and took down something that hung by a nail on one side of the chimney. It was my mason’s bag, sir, that I left behind me by mistake on the day when I hurried away without saying good-bye to my brother, and that had remained there in remembrance of me, just where I had placed it. She took it then and laid it on her knees before the joined hands of her two children. I saw something shining on the bag, sir ; it was the brass cross of her old necklace, which she had wished to give me when I went away, but which I would not take. It appeared that from that day she had never hung that necklace and cross round her neck, and had left them fastened to my little leather bag by a pin.

“ Now my children,” said she, “ pray to the good God before this crucifix, that he will receive the soul of your father into his holy paradise.” And the children bent down their heads as she did.

“ Pray that the good God will comfort and heal your grandmother, who is sick, and that he will preserve her to us, at least till you have grown up.” And they bent down their heads as she did.

"Pray for your uncle Claude, of whom we talk every day, and whose bag is under this crucifix, that if he is dead, the good God may grant him grace and mercy among his angels; and that if he is alive, the good God will take care of him in the far, far countries where he is travelling, and that he will give him a good wife and children like you, who love him well, and comfort him in his work."

And they bent down their heads like her; but she held hers down much longer than for the others; and when she put the crucifix and bag to her lips to kiss the cross, she touched the bag with her lips before hanging it again on the nail.

And I knew that Deniso still loved me. I did not want to see more, sir.

CHAPTER XII.

I.

THE fire soon went out in the room, and the silence of sleep took possession of the house. I alone roamed about outside on tiptoe, by the feeble light of the crescent moon, which had just risen behind the chestnut-trees. I did not know what I wished to do, but it was impossible for me to go away. My heart seemed fastened to the place by cords. I walked about here and there. I remembered all the familiar places where I used to be when I was a child, with my mother and brother, and herded the sheep with Deniso—the wells, the spring, the plum-trees, the orchard, the meadow, the grindstones for the corn. It seemed as if they all said to me, "Good day, Claude; it is a long time since we saw you; but we all remember you still, as the shell remembers the chestnut that was formed in it when it is put within it again for the winter." The soft light of the moon raining down over the leaves was like a secret illumination, that the spirits of the mountain might have silently lighted up to celebrate the return of the child of the mountain. I was calm; and yet I could not sleep.

II.

After having wandered everywhere and looked at every place, and even, I must own all my folly to you, after having

kissed many of the plum, cherry, and elder-trees, as if they had a heart under the bark to return my love, I again approached the hut and went round it. Then, tired with wandering in this manner to right and left, I sat down on a heap of straw which they had left for litter the evening before, between the door of the goats' shed and the staircase of the house, nearly in the place where you see my dog lying when you come into my cave now. Stretched there, sir, I cannot tell you how many thoughts revolved in my brain, whilst the crescent moon passed from one hill to another before my eyes. The stream that I heard murmuring beneath the darkness of the leaves, did not roll in a greater multitude of drops that night over its bed. It was very sorrowful and very sweet, both at once!

When I thought that my poor blind brother was no longer there, that my mother was, perhaps, on her deathbed, inconsolable, because she did not see even one of her two sons by her pillow, I felt as if my heart would break. Then, when I thought that Denise was up there, still so charming and so tender, watching near my mother, or sleeping by the beds of her little children, and that she still loved me enough to have taught my name of Claude to her children, and to make them pray to God for me on her crucifix, and on something that had belonged to me, I notwithstanding felt myself the happiest of all the men who were on the earth. In this long and doubtful combat between sorrow and happiness, my ideas became confused; I pulled the idiot beggar's cloak over my head, as we pull our jackets when we want to rest; I turned my face to the wall and fell asleep, saying to myself, "You will awake before day, and you will go up and hide under the chestnut-trees, and not enter the house till after the sun is well up and your poor mother is awake!"

III.

I thought I should only rest for a few hours, and sleep so lightly that I should hear the cock crow.

But, sir, my fatigue of body, and still more my fatigue of mind and heart, after all the feelings which had agitated me during two whole days, deceived my hope; and I slept so soundly and well, that neither the lark's song, nor the shrill

crowing of the cock, nor the lowing of a hundred oxen calling for the herdsman in their stalls, would have awoke me. It was the will of God ! I was as dead and as deaf as the stones of the stairs that I had myself hewn.

Alas ! it was, perhaps, a great misfortune. It would have been better for all that I should have gone under the chestnut-trees, and faltered in my desire to enter the hut, even to receive my mother's last blessing.

IV.

I do not know how long I slept, sir, but suddenly I heard a sound of light sabots coming down the steps of the staircase of the house right above my head, and still lighter and smaller sabots coming after ; then opening my eyes, I saw bright morning through the rents of my cloak, and then heard two little childish voices that said, "Look, mother, here is the Innocent lying asleep under the wall ; we dare not pass him." "Go by, run past, my little dears," replied the soft voice of a woman. It was the voice of Denise. "Come, come, the Innocent does no harm to any one. He is sleeping there, poor man, because he has found no barn open last night ; do not disturb his sleep,—you shall take him a porringer of milk and some bread, when I have milked the goats."

And she went into the shed to milk the goats, passing so near me that I felt the wind caused by the movement of her apron on my face.

V.

I leave you to think, sir, what I felt at that moment. I would rather have been a hundred feet underground, or have run far, very far away, than have been seen by Denise in that beggar's dress. What would she think of me ? But the two children had remained there by my side, as quiet as possible, out of obedience to their mother, and putting their little fingers on their mouths as they looked at me, in some fear of me and in fear of disobeying Denise. I did not dare therefore to move. I said to myself, "When she has passed with the wooden pail in her hand to go up to the house and get the porringer and bread, and the little ones have followed

her up, I will run away, and they will not know what has become of me when they come down to awake me."

-VI.

But unhappily there was a porringer in the goats' shed, and a bit of bread belonging to the little shepherd on the shelf over my head by the side of the door. On coming out from milking the goats, then, Denise, who was as full of pity for the poor as ever, holding a porringer of milk in one hand and a bit of the crumb of bread which she had steeped in it, in the other, came quite near me, leaned kindly over me, and speaking in her most gentle voice, "Awake, poor Benoit," said she; "the sun is getting high, you have slept very long; you must want your breakfast. Here is some bread and milk; take it, and you will pray to the good God for all the family—and for Claude!" she added in a more tender voice.

Ah! sir, to hear my name on her lips, and not to dare even to kiss her sabots. Can you imagine what I felt?

I felt, indeed, as if I had been struck by a thunderbolt; my forehead seemed paralyzed. I lay perfectly still, and hoped that she would go away, despairing of awakening me.

VII.

But Denise, uneasy that I gave her no answer, and the more because I even held my breath, that I might not move in the very least degree, believing, doubtless, that I had fallen down there ill or exhausted for want of food, called me still louder; and still receiving no answer, put down her pail, took the porringer in her left hand, and with her right drew the cloak away from my face, that the sun might shine on my eyes and awake me.

What did I feel like, and what did she feel, sir, when her hand raised the cloak and she saw, in the full light of the morning sun, instead of the face of the idiot, which she expected to find there, the face and figure of her betrothed Claude under the rags of a beggar.

VIII.

She uttered a cry which made the children and the

chickens rush about all over the court ; she let the porringer of milk fall out of her hand on the grass, and fell back half-fainting, trying to support herself on the first step of the stairs with her right hand. I rose hastily to run and help her. The children came back to see what was the matter, screaming and crying. The old mother came out half-dressed upon the gallery, to see what misfortune had happened to Denise. She recognized me, shrieked, and extended her arms. I ran to her, I kissed her, I carried her back to her death-bed.

I then returned to Denise, who was still in a fainting state, and supported her in my arms ; and then took her back into the house, weak and trembling, and seated her on the wooden bench near the table.

IX.

"Is it indeed you, Claude, in those poor clothes?" said she to me. "Is it indeed you, my poor dear, under that beggar's wallet? Is the family so unfortunate that a child of Les Huttes, so clever in his trade, and so helpful to others, is reduced to beg his bread from door to door? Ah, my God!"

I quickly reassured them, by owning to them why I had changed clothes with the idiot on the hill of Milly, in order to avoid being recognized by the shepherds, and to succeed in learning the state of the family without entering the house, if—I did not dare to finish what I was going to say, lest I should recall the past to Denise ; but I took out of my waistcoat pocket a handful of thirty-sous pieces, which I had earned at Lyons and Mâcon, and had this time kept for the house, in case money was wanted ; and I showed my mother and Denise the sleeves of my shirt, which was made of beautiful striped calico, such as the proudest girls in the country would have been happy to have, to make into stomachers and aprons.

The two women were convinced by these signs that I had not become a worthless dissipated fellow, and come home like a beggar to disgrace the family.

X.

They made me eat and drink with the children, who

became familiar with me, and laughed, and dressed themselves up in the beggar's cloak and wallet. I told them in a few words about my travels in my tour of France. "Oh, how large the world is!" they exclaimed, as I went on. Denise became quite pale when my mother asked me if I had not met with any girl that pleased me, and if I were not betrothed to any one. Then Denise became red as fire, and went out under pretence of going to give some grass to the kids, when I answered that I had not, and had not even thought of marrying.

When I was alone with my mother, she took advantage of the opportunity to tell me what had happened in the house during my absence, speaking quickly and in a low tone, for fear she should make Denise shed tears again.

XI.

"Ah, my poor Claude," she began, "how wrong I have been, and how much need have I to ask forgiveness of you! We never ought to will otherwise than as the good God does, look you, my dear boy, or sooner or later our will is crushed under his. You loved Denise; Denise loved you: my wishes were opposed to yours. I was too fond of my poor Gratien. It was very natural, because he was the most afflicted of my children; I thought that no one but Denise could be his comfort in his melancholy life. She obeyed me by sacrificing herself; good girl as she was! She said to me, 'My aunt, I will marry whichever you tell me, since I owe everything to you, and you are a mother to me.' I made you go away, thinking that you, who were a strong young man, and had your arms and your eyes, could find many another ready to be betrothed to you, while there was only one for the blind Gratien. And what happened? I will tell you, my boy.

XII.

"Grief entered by the door into the house almost before you had shut it behind you. First, Denise had an illness that lasted nearly six months, and deprived her of the use of her arms, of her strength, and her colour. She became as pale as the violets that grow in the shade under the hazel-nuts.

"Your poor brother, being blind, could have no suspicion of it, and no one told him, so that he believed she was as well as usual. Her kindness and sweetness remained the same, and the tone of her voice had something more tender in it than formerly. One might have likened it to the tone of a bell that has been split by the hammer. He believed, poor innocent, that it was a sign of her love for him having increased. He waited impatiently for the time when I should say to him, 'You may speak to Denise.'

XIII.

"At last I did say it to him. Denise consented without a murmur to that which I commanded. She had no dislike to Gratien : on the contrary, she loved him as an unfortunate brother.

"She devoted all her life to his heart, as the dog that we gave him when he was a child attached himself to his feet, so that he would never leave him. I betrothed them a year before. In the family and they only waited till the midsummer that succeeded, to marry. It made no more rejoicing, nor change, nor bustle in the house than if Milly, your bag and Denise did not show her feelings. Only if anything happened to fall on the ground, or if any relation passing, say, Les Huttes asked about you and mentioned your name, she went out to call her fowls or to sweep the landing-place of the staircase. But among us three not a word was said on the matter.

XIV.

"Three years passed in this manner, and Denise had first her little girl, then her boy. It seemed as if this ought to have brought more happiness into the house. But no ! it did not turn out as I expected.

"It happened that, one evening, you were spoken of in the country ; for a young man belonging to Saint Point, returning from the army, passed by Les Huttes, met Gratien on the door-step, and said to him : 'I have just come from Toulon : your brother Claude is at work in the fort, but he will not work long, poor fellow ! his companions say that his

heart is breaking ; that he will not take any amusement, nor drink, nor laugh with them ; that he is drier than his hammer, and thinner than his saw, and that he cannot live through the winter. He was just going away ; no one knew to what other place of work. I could not find him, to ask if he had any messages for home.'

"This poor soldier did not know the mischief he had done. He had given Gratien his death-stroke. Denise, who was at the other end of the house nursing her baby, had heard everything also ; she never said anything about it, but she became so ill that she lost her milk, and we were obliged to get one of the goats to be the baby's nurse.

"As to Gratien, he cried out and struck his forehead with his two hands, as if he had seen a flash of lightning for the first time. 'Ah ! I have killed my brother,' said he to me in a low voice as we went in ; 'my happiness has ruined his. I cannot live any longer !'

XV.

"From that day he never had a moment's peace ; Denise herself could never get one comfortable word from him again. Her voice, formerly so necessary to his ear, seemed to do him harm. He could not sleep, he ate nothing with any appetite ; he would not let either Denise or the children stay near him in the court or the house. He went and lay down alone with the goats in the shed. He would not even let me try to console him. He would say to me, 'It was you who sacrificed them for my happiness. You were wrong ; and as to me, I have been a Cain ! May the good God pardon us all, and take me quickly. I long to go above, to ask forgiveness of my brother.' I sent for the doctor ; but he said to me : 'This man has no complaint ; it is his mind. You must trust to time, poor woman, and do all you can to make him happy.'

"At the end of six months, he died, without any disease, begging your forgiveness, as if you had been there beside his bed, and saying : 'Denise, Denise, do not reproach me in eternity for having loved you in another's place. I have stolen another's happiness in your heart.' And many other things like these, my poor Claude !

"Denise, the children, and I, however, wept very much for

him. He was so good! It was his goodness that killed him.

XVI.

"This was nearly two years ago, my poor child, and times have been hard with us since;—very hard! Sickness took hold of me from my remorse about your misfortune, and the sorrow Denise had suffered, and my grief at your brother's death. My arms lost their strength like my heart: my limbs would not support me to go to the fields. Hardly had I begun my work, when I was obliged to lean on the handle of my rake. I was good for nothing, except to spin at my distaff, sitting by a bush, watching the animals.

"Denise, who had enough to do already with her two children, was obliged to rise before day, and not lie down till midnight, to see to everything,—the barley, the hay, the chestnuts. She had to dig, to weed, to reap, to bring in the sheaves, to thrash the corn, to thrash the chestnuts; everything, in short. She could not do it all, poor child, and bread began to be scarce in the house. I was obliged to take to my bed three weeks ago. The goats and sheep have been guarded only by the dog. Denise passes her days at my pillow, to take care of me. Misery was at the door as well as sorrow and death, when the good God sent you. May he bless you as I bless you, my poor Claude! Perhaps there will be a remedy for all our sorrows if you can stay with us now, become your mother's workman, the father of the children, and who knows, added she, weeping, a second time be betrothed to Denise?"

"Ah! yes," replied I, "my mother! If Denise does not despise me now that she has seen me in this beggar's dress, I will stay, I will never go away; I will love these little ones as my brother's children and my own; I will love Denise as I have always loved her, and as she will consent that I love her."

CHAPTER XIII.

I.

ALL being said; I set out to go to Mâcon to buy a jacket and other clothes, such as were proper for me to have, instead of the idiot's rags.

On my return next day, my mother had told everything to Denise. She received me very kindly, and poured my soup on pieces of bread for me, and seated me at the end of the table, in the place where she used to seat me when she was a young girl, and I was betrothed to her. I took the little boy and girl on my knees, and kissed them tenderly, that she might understand it was for her sake I loved them so much. And, really, the little girl was very like her, sir, and I seemed to embrace both in one.

But we did not speak together, because my mother had said that we must first obtain a permission from the mayor, and a dispensation from the curé, for a marriage between a brother and sister-in-law.

It was then I went down to the chateau, sir, and that your mother, who was so kind and so much loved throughout the mountain, received me graciously, and got me the papers. I saw you, then, quite young, with your sisters in the garden, but I did not know that a time would come when you would visit these rocks so often, to talk with a poor man like me.

II.

When I had got the paper, sir, we spoke, as we had spoken formerly, under the nut-trees, and among the bushes. Only the children picked poppies, and found nightingales' nests near us, and ran every instant to show them to me and their mother. Denise smiled with the tears in her eyes, and cried while she smiled, like an April day. She was still prettier than when she was eighteen, since she had been able to take her natural rest at night, and bread and milk were plentiful on the table; thanks to my savings, and she had me there by her side, without fear of any one finding.

fault and separating us. I had bought her blue cloth dresses, trimmed with red, with striped cotton aprons, and shoes with brass buckles as bright as her crucifix. Her cheeks had become as rosy as autumn apples. She ran, after her little girl down the meadow slope as lightly as if she had been her sister. Were we not young? Were we not merry? were we not happy, sir? The day drew near when we were to go down to the village to be married in presence of all the family. My mother had become young again herself, and began to see the sun in the court once more. Those nine years had become nothing but a bad dream, which seemed only to have lasted a single night.

III.

In the meanwhile I had resumed my trade, to put a little money into the house, and to buy the cupboard and linen that compose the proper fitting-out of new-married people in the country. As I had been so long absent from the valley of Saint Point, and as other stonemasons did not work so cheaply for the poor as I did, the poor of the villages in the mountain had a great deal of work to order from me. One had married his daughter, and wanted a room built for his son-in-law; another had a barn, a sink, or a pigeon-house out of repair. The women asked for salt-mortars, the men for grindstones, the herdsmen for troughs for their cattle, the labourers for flat stones with rounded ends, to lay at their doors. I earned, even at my low rate of wages, more than was required to furnish all we wanted to begin with: I had cleared my old quarry between Les Huttes and the valley of all the rubbish that had been accumulated in nine years by the crumbling of the rocks and the dashing of the rains, and of all the brambles that had grown across it. I had made a discovery of a hollow vault like a cavern under the beautiful fir-trees where Denise used to bring me my dinner, from which I hewed out thick blocks, square and sound, and as yellow as butter, such as might have been used for a pillar in a cathedral. I had recovered the strength of arm I had at eighteen. At every stroke of the pick, I said, as I saw the great drops of sweat fall from my brow on the stone, "It is for her!" And I felt stronger in the evening than the

morning. Ah! happy love in the heart is the best rest! We were all merry, even down to the little ones.

IV.

My mother had made fritters and light buck-wheat cakes for the wedding-day, which was to be on Midsummer-day. It was a Tuesday: she had invited all our young unmarried relations who were in Saint Point, or scattered here and there in the villages. There were about a dozen of them altogether, of all ages, sons and daughters of the egg-merchant, and others. The dressmakers had come to make the wedding-dress and cap for Denise, and all day they were trying on first one thing, then another. They went on prattling and laughing in the house from morning till night.

V.

As to me, sir, I laughed with them for a moment, and then went down to my work, but did not stay long at it on these last days. My heart was too completely with Denise. However, I had prepared a surprise for the wedding, a grand conclusion to the fireworks that it is the custom to let off on midsummer-eve on the mountains, and a volley louder than those they fire among us at weddings, in sign of rejoicing. I had worked in secret for a week at making a mine such as I saw made in the rocks at Toulon, sufficient to blow up all the arch of stone under the fir-trees at my quarry, and to give me materials for hewing, that would last me without further trouble for six months.

I had told no one, not even Denise, in order that it might explode unexpectedly at the end of the wedding-feast, and that all the people, even a league off on the mountains and in the valleys might say, when they heard the explosion, "There is the volley fired at the stonemason's wedding." I had filled it with half a hundred-weight of powder, well rammed down, with stone saw-dust over it. For fear of accident, I had attached a slow match to it, and had covered it with rubbish, dust, and dry grass, that the feet of the animals feeding in the neighbourhood might not disturb it. No one but myself knew the tuft of nettles where the end of the match was

rolled up, at the place where it was brought above ground beside the road, near the quarry.

VI.

On the morning before the wedding-day, I went again to the quarry, that I might not let my arm get out of practice, as they say ; I worked a little both with pick and lever, visited my match, prepared my tinder, with a train of gunpowder reaching to the road, and said to myself, "To-morrow you will come down and strike a light, the powder will take fire, the tinder will burn, it will communicate the fire slowly to the match ; you will have time without hurrying yourself to go up again to Les Huttes, you will drink a glass to the health of your relations, giving a kiss to Denise at the same time, and the mine will blow up." This was my fancy, sir

VII.

This being done, I ran down to the village of Saint Point to buy six bottles of white wine for the feast of next day. I had some chat and many jokes with one person or another, the master of the *cabaret*, the bell-ringer, the curé, and his servant. Every one stopped me and complimented me on my happiness in being about to marry so good and so beautiful a widow ; for she was well known and much loved, though she was only seen on chance occasions at church, at the principal festivals, and never at dances. She was called, as I have told you, "the Pretty Savage of Les Huttes," but she was respected all the more. Everywhere, I was offered a glass of wine, and I could not refuse it without being rude ; I drank a few too many. As a proof of this, I, who only whistled over my work, went up towards Les Huttes at night when it was growing dark, singing so loud, that my voice frightened the birds out of the trees and bushes where they had gone to sleep.

VIII.

I thought of nothing but the happiness of being next day the bridegroom of Denise, and of coming down here again.

with her ; I fancied her as she would look, with a large bouquet in her stomacher, and another in her cap, all made of red pinks. I saw her laughing on my arm, with her beautiful shoes on her feet, or carried in her hand, for fear of wearing them out on the stones. I had quite forgotten that this was midsummer-eve ; the evening on which they carry about torches of lighted straw and pine-wood on the mountains.

As I drew near my place of work in the darkness, I heard a sound among the leaves, and a whispering of women's and children's voices on the other side of the quarry, high up under the great fir-tree. I stopped, and said to myself, "It is Denise, the dress-makers, and the children who have come to meet me, for the pleasure of surprising me, as I am so late coming home." And it was only too true ; for at the moment the thought occurred to me, I heard the clear and tremulous voice of Denise. She shouted to me with all her strength, laughing as she did so, and I heard her plainly from one side of the quarry to the other. The children then shouted like her with their sweet little voices, crying, "Claude, Claude !" merrily across the woods.

I answered, shouting also that my voice might rise to them, who were up at the top, and I deep below, "Denise, Denise ! I hear you ! here I am !" and I ran forwards to get to them and kiss them, hurrying round the rocky boundaries of my quarry.

But at this moment, sir, a great light smote my eyes, and a dozen voices of young men, girls, and children began to shout at the opposite side to the elevation where I had heard Denise. It was the company of guests asked to the wedding of next day, who had come to do me honour, and surprise me by passing the night at Les Huttes, and carrying their torches of lighted straw and pine-wood round Denise and me, in sign of rejoicing. They lighted them the instant that they heard me answer Denise, and advanced, waving their flames and showers of sparks above their heads in the darkness.

IX.

By the light of these torches, I saw Denise clearly at the top of the quarry, exactly over the vault opposite to me.

Her boy held her by the hand, and her little girl was clinging round her neck, seated on her arm, as the holy virgin is represented carrying the infant Jesus. She looked towards me with a countenance full of happiness and love, all lighted up by the reflection of the fire. I held out my arms towards her, then I uttered a loud cry, and made a sign to her to escape from the place where she was standing.

A sudden thought had struck me, like a blow from a hammer on my head. The torch-bearers were getting near the road where I had laid the train on my tinder in the morning. A spark carried by the wind would be quite enough to light the match and blow up the rock over the cavern where Denise was.

Alas! sir, I thought too late. I had scarcely time to command my tongue, that was glued to the roof of my mouth, and stretch out my hand to Denise, when a clap of subterranean thunder burst forth beneath her feet, and I saw her, with her two little children still clinging to her, flung up into the air as high as the top of the fir-tree; and then she fell downwards above a cloud of smoke, like a saint descending from the sky, to be engulfed with them in the cavern that had just been opened, and now closed again with a noise like the crumbling of the whole world upon her! Great God! why did it not at the same moment close over me!

I could not suppress a cry of horror and a tear of pity.

X.

I saw that he could not go on. I had compassion on his desolation. I hastened to draw him away towards another place, and to divert his thoughts from this horrible conclusion of his love, putting off to another day hearing the details of the event which was still talked of throughout our mountains. He understood me; he rose trembling, weeping, and praying. "It was the will of God, sir." He bent under the Divine hand, as if he felt it on his head.

We both took the road towards the valley in silence. As we passed the empty quarry, he turned away his head. I

saw a stone cross against the old trunk of a fir-tree, which I had not before observed, above a large excavation. It was doubtless the spot where he had seen Denise, after the explosion, carried up towards heaven, like a saint above a cloud.

He accompanied me this time to the edge of the meadow. I seemed to have become dearer to him since I had wept for Denise with him.

CHAPTER XIV.

I.

WHEN I returned on the following Sunday, "Alas! sir," said he to me, "what more have you to learn? I have nothing more to tell you. Denise was found dead, with her two children, by the pioneers, among the scattered stones in the cavern. The physician said they had died suffocated by the smoke and fire of the mine before they fell into the sepulchre which I had hollowed out to receive them.

"They brought them out to the place where you are sitting, and laid them by my mother, who had not been able to survive our misfortune a single day. If you were to remove the turfy covering from this bed of earth, you would see a whole family.

"They keep my place ready for me, as you see sir: there is my marriage-bed by the side of Denise."

I saw an empty place between two graves.

"And you live here," said I to him, "always face to face with your vanished love?"

"I could not live elsewhere," he replied; "my heart has taken root here, like this bush, which draws up its sap from death."

"And do you not murmur within yourself, Claude, against that Providence which has twice shown you happiness so near, only to snatch it away, when you thought you held it within your arms?"

"I murmur against God, sir!" he exclaimed. "Oh no! He knows what he does, and we—we only know what we

suffer. But I have always thought that sufferings were the desires of man's heart, crushed within his heart until there issues thence resignation, that is to say, perfect prayer;—the human will bent under the hand from on high."

"But this desire, bent under the hand from on high; will it never rise again, Claude, like a compressed spring when the weight that held it down is removed?"

"Yes, sir; but if it rises again in this world, that is rebellion; if it rises again above, that is heaven."

"And what is heaven, according to your idea, Claude?"

"It is the will of God, in heaven, as on earth, sir."

"But if this will should be again contrary to yours, above, and should again separate you from her whom you love?"

"Very well! I should again wait; yes, sir, I should wait for an eternity without murmuring, until the good God should say to me, 'Here is that thou seekest.'"

"You firmly believe, then, that you shall find Denise again?"

"Yes, sir."

"And when?"

"When it shall please God."

"And, while you wait, do you suffer?"

"I do not suffer any longer, sir. I love and I hope."

"And you believe also; is it not so?"

"No, sir, I have not the trouble of believing. I live on two loves; is not love faith? I have enough for two."

"You are not very unhappy then?"

"Not unhappy at all, sir: God has given me grace to see him everywhere, even in my sorrows. Can we be unhappy in the company of the good God?"

II.

I often returned, during the summer, to visit Claude, and converse with him on different subjects, but especially of divine things. I always felt the same delight in his simplicity, and in the unction of his words. He was to me like one of those tree trunks in which the bees have left a comb under the rude bark, which we find on the borders of a forest, and taste with delight after a long walk in parching heat.

I passed some time without returning to Saint Point. I returned there in 18—, and went up to Les Huttes. I found only a wild goat there, browsing on the grass that had grown on the floor of the empty and abandoned hut. Another hillock had been raised in the enclosure, beside that in which Denise slept.

I met one of the egg-merchant's sons, who had been picking up the fallen plums in the orchard, to fill his ass's panniers.

"Claude is dead, then?" said I to him.

"Yes, sir, two years since, last Martinmas," replied the poor cripple.

"And what did he die of?"

"Oh, he died of love of the good God, according to what M. le Curé says."

"How love of God, Benoit? We live, but do not die of it," said I. "Perhaps it was also of love of Denise?"

"Ah! sir, it was in this way. He loved God so much, that he never thought of himself any more than a swallow that has just come out of the egg, and would not know how to eat if its mother did not bring it a fly in its nest. He had kept nothing against days of sickness, he worked in all the villages for the love of God. He only said to those he worked for: 'If I should become infirm or ill, you will feed me, will you not?'

"And, in fact, sir, he broke his leg, and put out his shoulder, in raising the roof of the widow Baptistine's hut, which had fallen in, during the night, on her and her children; in saving her life, he lost his own."

"But every one took care of him, did they not, in his last illness; for they are very kind in the country, especially when it is not necessary to expend a poor farthing?"

"Oh! yes, sir, they brought him up on a litter into his hut, and one day one person, another day another, came up to him, to bring him his bread, and turn him on his straw. He need not have wanted for anything, sir. But he was so afraid of doing a wrong to the poor, and taking anything which was not his due, that he would absolutely receive nothing more than just his morsel of bread for himself and his dog. And when they tried to make him accept more,

such as a little meat or broth to support him, or a drop of wine to raise his spirits, he said, 'No, I have not earned that of you, I will not have it, I should be doing a wrong to your children.' So at last, as no prayers nor reasons would do, they were obliged to take it all away again.

"One day that he seemed weaker than usual, we went, my wife and I, and carried him some broth made of a chicken that we had killed for him, and I said to him: 'Take some, Claude. We have killed our sucking-pig, and have made some soup for you of it.'

"'Oh! no,' said he, looking into the basin, 'this is not broth made of a sucking-pig; you have killed a chicken to feast me; but I will not take your property, because I can never return it to you.'

"It was vain to talk, sir, nothing could be done; he would not take the broth that would have strengthened him. He would only accept some bread; my wife left the basin full on the floor of his bed, and we went away. Next day when I went back to keep him company on his Sunday, the basin was still where we left it, full, and he, sir, he was dead of weakness, with his black dog lying on his feet. Ah! he was a saint of the good God, that he was!"

III.

Now, when autumn takes me back to Saint Point, I sometimes go up to Les Huttes when the chestnut leaves are falling. The tomb of poor Claude inspires me with prayer, resignation, and peace. I love to sit there at sunset, and think of him and Denise, united again under the rays of the sun that never sets.

IV.

And this man is lost to me in the valley. The little lamp, that I used to see shining at night from my window across the mists of the mountain, has vanished like a star which has been extinguished in this portion of the heavens, or a glow-worm that used to light up the grass under a bush, and has suddenly become dark at your foot.

It was only a worm of the earth, but this worm of the earth contained a particle of the fire of the sun. Such was poor Claude. .

Sometimes, in the midst of the fields, when all is silence in the valley, under the burning atmosphere of noon on a summer's day, I listen unconsciously, and imagine I hear from the mountain the distant and regular ring of his hammer on the sounding stone, like a rustic pendulum of the dial of eternity !

THE END

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